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OF Master Hongyi's Last Calligraphic Work

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Résumé

Hongyi (1860-1942) est le maître de l'école bouddhiste appelée « Terre Pure » en Chine moderne. Dans l'histoire du bouddhisme chinois, il est le seul maître bouddhiste qui peut se classer parmi les plus grands calligraphes chinois. Dans l'histoire de la calligraphie chinoise, il est le premier moine-calligraphe qui allie sa foi bouddhiste avec son art calligraphique tout en appliquant des principes de la peinture occidentale à son travail de calligraphie. Son art serve bien sa croyance religieuse et n'est pas indépendant de celle-ci, ce qui est extraordinaire dans l'histoire calligraphique. Il utilise le concept bouddhiste de «une forme sans forme» pour interpréter la calligraphie chinoise, et propose une série de théories calligraphiques bouddhistes pour guider sa pratique. D'ailleurs, sa calligraphie ne sert qu'à retranscrire les textes bouddhistes classiques et contemporains. Ses œuvres illustrent donc l'influence du bouddhisme chinois sur la calligraphie chinoise. Traditionnellement, la dernière œuvre d'un calligraphe est souvent considérée comme son chef-d'œuvre en fonction de deux critères: sa technique et son contenu moral. En outre, quelques-unes des dernières œuvres de grands calligraphes ont survécu. La rareté les rend encore plus précieuses. *Bei xin ji jiao* («悲欣交集») est la dernière œuvre de Hongyi, qui a été achevée trois jours avant son nirvana. Ce mémoire sera d'étudier et d'analyser l'influence de sa pensée bouddhiste sur le contenu littéraire et la forme artistique de cette œuvre, et d'explicitier qu'elle guide pleinement vers l'état ultime de sa pratique bouddhiste au plus haut niveau de sa calligraphie.

Mots-clés : Hongyi, calligraphie chinoise, école Bouddhiste de la Terre Pure, une forme sans forme, principes de la peinture occidentale

Abstract

Hongyi (1860-1942) is a Master of Pure Land Buddhism in modern China. In the history of Chinese Buddhism, he is the only Buddhist Master who can rank among the greatest Chinese calligraphers. In the history of Chinese calligraphy, he is the first monk calligrapher who combines his Buddhist faith with his calligraphic art, and applies Western painting principles in his work of calligraphy. His calligraphic art well serves his religious belief, not independent from the latter as it is in most cases in the history. He uses the Buddhist concept of “a form without form” to interpret Chinese calligraphy, and puts forward a series of Buddhist calligraphic theories to guide his practice. Moreover, his calligraphy serves only to transcribe classical and contemporary Buddhist texts. In this sense, his calligraphic work exemplifies the influence of Chinese Buddhism on Chinese calligraphy. Traditionally, the last work of a calligrapher is often considered as his masterpiece according to two standards: its technique and its moral content. Furthermore, few of the last works by great calligraphers have survived. Scarcity makes these works even more valuable. *Bei xin jiao ji* (“悲欣交集”) is Hongyi’s last calligraphic work, which was completed three days before his nirvana. This thesis will study and analyze the influence of Hongyi’s Buddhist thought on the literary content and artistic form of this work and expounds that his last work fully displays the ultimate state of his Buddhist practice and the highest level of his calligraphy.

Keywords : Hongyi, Chinese calligraphy, Pure Land Buddhism, a form without form,

Western painting principles

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Introduction

Buddhism was imported into China during the first century of the Common Era.¹ Combined with the Chinese native culture of Confucianism and Taoism, it gradually got sinicized and evolved into various Buddhist schools with Chinese characteristics.² From the Tang Dynasty (618-907) on, the Chinese emperors advocated Mahayana classics and raised Chinese Buddhism to the same important position as Confucianism and Taoism. The culture of Chinese Buddhism was widely ingrained in the Chinese literati, whose mindset formerly was based mainly on Confucianism and Taoism.³ These well-educated elite not only paid much tribute to Buddhism in their ideology, but also demonstrated some of their Buddhist ideas in their works of Chinese calligraphy. The late calligraphic works by Su Shi (1037-1101) in Song Dynasty (960-1276) are typical examples of them.⁴

¹ Jeaneane and Merv Fowler, *Chinese Religions: Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), p. 114.

² Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1997), pp. 581-82. A well-known and carefully documented biography of Hongyi with the author's academic view of Chinese Buddhism, Chinese calligraphy and Hongyi's Buddhist thought.

³ Li Haifeng. "Cong 'Jingangjing' dao 'Huayan wujiao zhiguan' de panruo yili de fazhan [The development of the Buddhist concept of Prajna: from its expression in *Diamond Sutra* to its expression in *Outline of the Gist of Flower Garland Sutra*]," *Fa yin* [*Voice of Dharma*], No. 1 (2008), p. 16.

⁴ Xing Lili, *Su Shi Huangzhou shiqi shuji zhi yanjiu* [*Study of Su Shi's calligraphic works during his time in Huangzhou*], Diss. Guoli zhengzhi daxue [National Chengchi University], 2003,

Chinese calligraphy refers to the principles of writing Chinese characters. It came into being in the first centuries of the Common Era with the emergence of the Chinese literati.⁵ These individuals were well-known government officials influenced by both Confucian and Taoist traditions, such as Zhong You (151-230) in *Wei* (220-266) during Three Kingdoms (220-280) and Wang Xizhi (303-361) in Eastern *Jin* Dynasty (316-420). They studied and explored the aesthetic dimensions of writing Chinese characters and cultivated a full set of artistic skills to write them and aesthetic criteria to appreciate them. These were well based on the cultural values of Confucianism and Taoism and were used to distinguish their calligraphy from the common or popular Chinese handwriting at that time. Since then, for over 1500 years, the skills have been well used to write Chinese characters and became vitally important for all kinds of government officials to know and master them and what is more, their mastery is indispensable to members of the elite.

Chinese Buddhism first influenced the literary content of calligraphic works, as embodied in a great number of manuscripts and stone inscriptions of Buddhist classic and contemporary texts, such as the manuscript of *The Diamond Sutra* copied by Liu Gongquan (778-865) and the stone inscription of *Sheng jiao xu* [*Foreword to the collection of Xuanzang's translations of Buddhist sutras*] by Chu Suiliang (596-658) – *Sheng jiao xu* was a text written by Emperor Taizong of *Tang* (599-649) about Monk

pp. 99-102.

⁵ Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function," in *Orientation*, October 1986, p. 35.

Xuanzang's journey to India.⁶ From the *Song* Dynasty onward, some mandarins who were also great calligraphers, such as Su Shi and Dong Qichang (1555-1636), used Buddhism to interpret calligraphy and guide their calligraphic practice. However, Hongyi (1860-1942), the most influential Buddhist Master in modern China, was the first monk who used Buddhism to guide his calligraphic practice in Chinese history and his calligraphic art well serves his religious belief, not independent from it as it is in most cases in the history. Zhiyong who lived in *Sui* Dynasty(581-618) and Huaisu (725-785) in *Tang* Dynasty are two best-known monk-calligraphers before Hongyi, but they did not consciously translate their Buddhist thinking into their calligraphic art⁷ as Hongyi did.

Zhiyong was a descendant of Wang Xizhi, who is well-known as the supreme calligrapher in Chinese calligraphic history. He dedicated his life to carrying forward Wang Xizhi's calligraphic aesthetics, and is regarded as the major figure in founding the *Jin-Tang* styled system of calligraphy.⁸ Huaisu was enthusiastic about the fully cursive script — one of the five canonical types of Chinese calligraphy, and he turns out to be famous for his “crazy” cursive style created especially when he got heavily

⁶ Hao Songzhi, “Da tang san zang sheng jiao xu he tangdai fojiao de xingsheng [*Sheng jiao xu* and prosperity of Buddhism in Tang Dynasty],” *Shaanxi shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue yu shehui kexue ban)* [*Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*], 29, No. 1 (2000), 100-101.

⁷ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*] (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 191-94, 198-200.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

drunk.⁹ His calligraphic art has nothing to do with his Buddhist practice as he claimed, in his *Zi xu tie* [*Autobiography*], that “Huaisu, originally from [the place of] Changsha, began to practice Buddhism when he was young, and was devoted to calligraphy outside of his Buddhist practice.”¹⁰ Because of the multiplication of Buddhist schools, traditional China witnessed the emergence of many different Buddhist Masters known for their virtues and knowledge. Most of them were both versed in Chinese classics and good at Chinese calligraphy, but they are not normally considered as great calligraphers in Chinese history. For example Fazang (643-712), the founder of Flower Garland Buddhism, and Yinguang (1861-1940), a renowned Master of Pure Land Buddhism, both of them practiced calligraphy, but only as amateurs. As a result, their works are mostly praised for their moral contents but not for their artistic qualities.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism, Hongyi was the first and only Buddhist Master who ranked among the greatest Chinese calligraphers and devoted to combining his Buddhist thought with his calligraphy in his monastic life. He once stated: “My calligraphy is tantamount to my Buddhist belief. There is no need to distinguish between the two,”¹¹ and “The best calligraphic work originates from Buddhist faith.”¹² In reality, he used the Buddhist concept of “a form without form”

⁹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lin Ziqing, comp., *Hongyi dashi xinpu* [*Newly-edited chronology of Master Hongyi*] (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1993), p. 344.

¹² Hongyi. “Tan xiezi de fangfa [Of the way to practice Chinese calligraphy],” *Li Shutong*

from *The Flower Garland Sutra* as the guideline of his calligraphy,¹³ and thus put forward a series of Buddhist calligraphic theories to further guide his practice. “Hongyi-style” was his best-known calligraphic example. It refers to his late calligraphic style of the period from 1927 to 1942, as exemplified by *Huayan jilian sanbai* [*Three hundred couplets adapted from “The Flower Garland Sutra”*] written in 1929.¹⁴ Most modern and contemporary scholars represented by the renowned scholar Ma Yifu (1883-1967) considered it as a Buddhist calligraphic style, because it

tan yi [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], ed. Xingchi (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007), p. 199. This book contains not only Hongyi's teachings on the art, but also the commentaries on his calligraphy by well-known modern and contemporary scholars.

¹³ “A form without form” is written as “無相” in Chinese. It is also translated into “non-existent form” and “non-existence of forms.” See Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (University park: Penn State University Press, 1991), pp. 224-230. In *The Flower Garland Sutra*, this term is frequently used together with “emptiness” to describe the Buddha's omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. For example, we read: “Fo shen ru kong bu ke de, wu xiang wu ai bian shi fang [My translation: The Buddha's reality is like infinite emptiness, and takes on a form without form which is non-obstructing and omnipresent in the ten directions].” See Xuanhua shangren, *Da fang guang fo hua yan jing qian shi (yi)* [*Commentaries on “The Great Vaipulya Sutra of the Buddha's Flower Garland,”* Vol. 1] (Shanghai: Shanghai foxue shuju, 1997), p. 200.

¹⁴ Jiang Fapu, “Jingzhan wulun de shenpin, fangbian duzhong de fashi: ye tan Hongyi dashi de shufa yishu [Consummate masterpieces, Buddhist artifacts for salvation: an essay on Master Hongyi's calligraphic art],” in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [*The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi*], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoxiang (Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2005), pp. 305-306.

reflected Hongyi's Buddhist learning and experience as a disciplinary monk.¹⁵ Meanwhile, his calligraphy served only to transcribe Buddhist classical and contemporary texts. My study and analysis of his *Bei xin jiao ji* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow*] try to find out to what extent his calligraphic work of "Hongyi-style" exemplifies the influence of Chinese Buddhism on Chinese calligraphy.

Generally, the last work of a calligrapher is usually considered as his masterpiece. For example, *Zi qie shi* [*Poem on purple eggplants*], Dong Qichang's last calligraphic work, is universally accepted as one of his best works in his life.¹⁶ Furthermore, few of the last works by great calligraphers have survived in the history of Chinese calligraphy. The scarcity of the last calligraphic works makes them even more valuable. So does Hongyi's last calligraphic work of *Bei xin jiao ji*, which was completed three days before his nirvana.

Chapter one focuses on the influence of Hongyi's Buddhist thought on the literary content of *Bei xin jiao ji*. The first part introduces Hongyi as a Pure Land

¹⁵ For example, Ma Yifu used the following words to comment Hongyi's *Huayan jilian sanbai*: "[My translation] Hongyi's script is elaborate and meticulous, purified and fabulous, and reminds of the Buddhist work by Daoxuan [596-667, also called Nanshan, the founder of Nanshan Vinaya Buddhism]. It is all because he takes seriously the vinaya [monastic precepts] and knows well the teachings of Nanshan and Lingzhi [1048-1116], [two renowned Masters of Pure Land Buddhism and Vinaya Buddhism]. The force of *Nei xun* [内熏, one's aspiration for nirvana and enlightenment] is naturally revealed [from his calligraphy] and can only be perceived by discerning scholars." See Xingchi, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], p. 244.

¹⁶ Lin Tao, ed., *Dong Qichang zi qie shi* [*Dong Qichang's calligraphic work of "Poem on purple eggplants"*] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2003), pp. 1-2.

Buddhist calligrapher by providing background information for later chapters. Hongyi was deeply influenced by his mentor Master Yinguang and his Buddhist thought was mainly based on Pure Land Buddhism and was affected by Flower Garland Buddhism, Vinaya Buddhism and Confucianism as well.¹⁷ His practice of Chinese calligraphy played an important role in his monastic life. Since he followed Buddhist rules, his calligraphic work was no longer a mundane cultural form, but became a Buddhist practice. He did it to preach Buddhism. He perfected his calligraphy in order to advance his progress in Buddhism. Thus, his well-known “Hongyi-style” once shown in his previous calligraphic works can be thought as a transitional form of his calligraphy before it reaches its perfection, which finds its expression in his last calligraphic work.

The second part of this chapter studies the theme of *Bei xin jiao ji*. Pure Land Buddhism considers the last moment of life as the most important to a disciple, who is expected to transfer his merits gained by his Buddhist practice as much as possible and keep an attitude of utmost sincerity in every single cause on his deathbed.¹⁸ Hongyi predicted his nirvana and planned the activities of his last days in detail in accordance with Pure Land Buddhist instructions. To write *Bei xin jiao ji* was part of his plan of passing and every detail in this calligraphic work was carefully designed. Although his previous works also showed Buddhist classics or expressed his Buddhist

¹⁷ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], pp. 568-69.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 669-73.

thought, they emphasized either their content or form to a degree to meet the interests of different audiences. They merely serve as a whole to transmit as much as possible his merits gained by his Buddhist practice. However, his *Bei xin jiao ji* alone can serve the purpose completely and both its content and form play equally important roles in the realization of his final goal of nirvana. The pure karma, an attitude of utmost sincerity as well as the aspiration for attainment to the Western Pure Land are the most important merits he gained by his Buddhist practice and aspired to transfer at his last moment.

The context and theme of a calligraphic work determine its content and form. The third part of this chapter briefly explains the content and form of *Bei xin jiao ji*. The written words and graphic elements on both sides of the paper consist of its literary content, while the newly written characters and the composition show its artistic form. Therefore, his last work unifies three different elements: literature, calligraphy and drawing while his previous works display only two of them: literature and calligraphy.

And then, the Buddhist influence that was embodied will be furthermore analyzed in the literary content of *Bei xin jiao ji*, including the main content, the text shown on the paper back, and the used piece of paper. Chinese scholars and sinologists in the past borrowed from Confucian and Taoist concepts to interpret Buddhist texts and then translated them into classical Chinese. Because of the fusion of the three schools, Chinese Buddhists tended to sinicize originals and amalgamate interpretations with Confucianism and Taoism. The Buddhist texts quoted in this

chapter are from the English versions of *The Shurangama Sutra*¹⁹ and *The contemplation Sutra*²⁰ translated from well-known Chinese versions. Hongyi has left abundant Buddhist texts, which fully display his Buddhist thought and reveal his personality. These texts are considered as important references for Chinese Buddhism.²¹ For this reason, this chapter frequently refers to these texts and takes them as general knowledge of Chinese Buddhism, not only that of his own Buddhist ideas. Owing to the ambiguity of Chinese ideographic characters and the intertextuality of Chinese literature, the vocabulary and terminology of Chinese Buddhism are capable of conveying more than their original meanings in the texts. For example, the original meaning of the Chinese character of “行” is “to walk,” but its extended meaning is “to behave” that includes “to walk, stay, sit, and sleep,” which are written in Chinese as “行, 住, 坐, 卧.” Another example is that the original meaning of “誠” is “sincerity,” but it can also be used to express “utmost sincerity” written in Chinese as “至[utmost]誠” or “至誠恭敬.” In the case of “至誠恭敬,” “誠,” “恭,” “敬,” all the three characters can express “sincerity” and “utmost

¹⁹ Buddhist Text Translation Society, ed., *The Shurangama Sutra*, 10 vols. (Burlingame: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2002).

²⁰ Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, ed., “The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus Buddha,” *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003). *The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus Buddha* is known as *The Contemplation Sutra* for short.

²¹ Li Muyuan, “Tan Hongyi dashi zhi chujia (daixu) [An essay on Master Hongyi’s conversion to Buddhism (Preface)],” in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [*The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi*], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoxiang, pp. 1-2.

sincerity” and they are both interrelated and independent from each other. Similarly, the four words of *Bei xin jiao ji* can be interpreted either as a phrase that means “a mixture of joy and sorrow” in accordance with the text of *The Shurangama Sutra* or as four different single words of *Bei*, *Xin*, *Jiao*, and *Ji* with different Buddhist meanings and each is described as Hongyi once said. Hongyi wrote his last calligraphic work on a used piece of paper and drew some figures rarely seen in his previous calligraphic works. What was his motivation to choose such an unusual arrangement? In fact, this extraordinary setting contributes to the originality of his work. It demonstrates that he has reached the highest stage of Buddhist enlightenment, which provided him greater freedom to enrich his last work with utmost spiritual meanings.

Chapter two analyses the influence of Hongyi’s Buddhist thought on the artistic form of *Bei xin jiao ji*. A form without form is an important Buddhist concept of Flower Garland Buddhism.²² Hongyi applied it in his last work of calligraphy, which exemplified this concept. In this chapter, I will elaborate how this last work coincides with this Buddhist standard. According to this Buddhist school, a form without form stresses three coexistent aspects of Emptiness: the “ego-lessness,” the non-clinging and non-abiding, and the all-embracing and non-obstructing. Emptiness is the core

²² Fazang (643-712), the founder of Flower Garland Buddhism, teaches about the concept of “a form without form” in his notable “Jin shizi zhang [Essay on the golden lion],” which is regarded as the most succinct and imaginative interpretation of *The Flower Garland Sutra*. Its translation and interpretation can be found in Chang’s *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, pp. 224-30.

idea of Buddhism and represents the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent mind of a Buddha. Firstly, “ego-lessness” means to relinquish the idea of “clinging-to-ego,” which is the fundamental obstacle that stands in the way to Emptiness.²³ Secondly, based on the “ego-lessness,” the non-clinging and non-abiding are a complete removal of the idea of being and a thorough liberation from clinging to any form of being.²⁴ Thirdly, the all-embracing and non-obstructing are at the ultimate level of Emptiness and featured by the inclusion and harmony of all the beings.²⁵ According to this Buddhist idea, a calligraphic form without form is between similarities and differences with all previous calligraphic styles. The calligrapher must erase his identity as much as possible by making his personal style impenetrable and coexistent in harmony with canonical types and styles in the history of Chinese calligraphy, and thus develop a brand new calligraphic style, in which the canonical types and styles as well as his personal styles are integrated seamlessly at all levels without showing any preference.

To realize such a style, the calligrapher must master the history of Chinese calligraphy thoroughly, and its canonical types and styles completely so that his calligraphic works will exemplify his perfect mastery of them. The second part of this chapter briefly introduces the history of Chinese calligraphy, its five canonical types of script and its two canonical writing systems, the *Jin-Tang* [the period from Eastern

²³ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

Jin Dynasty to *Tang* Dynasty] style and the *Bei-xue* [epigraphic and archeological study] style. The third part will describe Hongyi's study of Chinese calligraphy and the evolution of his personal calligraphic style. It consists of three phases: the period of *Bei-xue* style, the period of *Jin-Tang*-style (known also as the early "Hongyi-style"), and the period of late "Hongyi-style." Among his three styles, his late "Hongyi-style" is the best-known. It combines five canonical types of scripts as well as the *Jin-Tang* style and *Bei-xue* style. The last part of this chapter analyzes how Hongyi's last script equally treated all the types and styles to create an all-inclusive style, in accordance with his understanding of Buddhist principles concerning a form without a form. I will compare his last calligraphic work with his previous works in light of masterworks of two canonical writing systems.

Chapter three explains the influence of Hongyi's Buddhist faith on the composition of *Bei xin jiao ji*. Hongyi was also a disciple of the Buddhist School of Flower Garland. This school emphasizes the all-embracing and non-obstructing aspect of Emptiness and advocates the thought of "perfect harmony among all differences." He believed that Buddhism was not contrary to Western science, but inclusive of and above it.²⁶ This is one of his innovative Buddhist ideas, which led to his most significant reform of Chinese calligraphy: he applied Western painting principles to the composition of his calligraphy. He began this innovation during his study of

²⁶ Hongyi, "Fofa shiyi lueshi [Explaining ten questions in Buddhism]," *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], ed. Zhou Hong (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 78-79.

Western painting in Japan, where he concentrated his study especially on impressionism. In his view, Western painting represents the spirit of science because its techniques and composition are based on scientific principles,²⁷ for example the use of perspective in Western paintings. According to his Buddhist belief, his practice in Chinese calligraphy was equivalent to his Buddhist practice and his calligraphy was part of his religious activity. The inclusion of Western painting principles in his calligraphic work, to some extent, corresponds to his inclusion of the science in Buddhism. Chinese calligraphy and Western painting are two different artistic systems. Hongyi followed Western painting principles: unity, variety and order, and the principles of composition advocated by Nathan Goldstein in his *Design and Composition*.²⁸

For this reason, in Chapter Three, I will use some of Goldstein's pictures and Hongyi's own drawings and paintings to illustrate the composition of his last calligraphic work at different levels, to show that he was strongly influenced by the Flower Garland Buddhism on his artistic vision of Chinese calligraphy, and that he followed the Western principles of design and composition to create the visual harmony in his last calligraphic work.

²⁷ Hongyi taught about the relation between science and Western painting to his disciple Shen Benqian. See Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*] (Changsha: Hunan daxue chubanshe, 2011), pp. 150-51. This book collects Hongyi's articles, letters and discourses about art and literature, as well as some reminiscences of his friends and disciples about his art life.

²⁸ Nathan Goldstein, *Design and Composition* (New Jersey: Englewood), 1989.

My thesis will study to what extent Hongyi can be considered the most important Buddhist calligrapher by analyzing four aspects of his last work: 1) his transference of the merits advocated by Pure Land Buddhism; 2) his applications of the Buddhist idea of a form without form; 3) his combination of his faith and science—an innovative concept based on Flower Garland Buddhism; 4) using form and content to express his faith fully.

Chapter I

Hongyi and His *Bei Xin Jiao Ji*

Part 1 Hongyi as a Pure Land Buddhist calligrapher

Hongyi, formerly named Li Shutong, was born in Tianjin to a family of salt and banking business, known as “Li-family *Tongda*.” It was one of the most wealthy and eminent families in the late *Qing* Dynasty.²⁹ The family wealth allowed him to receive a systematic education of Chinese traditional art and culture from some famous literati, as well as Western art and culture abroad. In his secular days he was known as a versatile artist and art educator well-versed in Chinese traditional poetry, calligraphy, Western painting, as well as music and drama. He strictly followed and strongly advocated a Confucian aesthetic notion that “To become respected and influential, a scholar must first cultivate his moral character and then practice art and literature.”³⁰ In reality, he was well-recognized for his excellent education and moral values. He made great achievements in various fields and was most celebrated for his

²⁹ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], pp. 4-8.

³⁰ Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art], p. 388.

calligraphy. In his twenties, he was famous for his traditional calligraphy. After he learnt Western painting, he began to apply its principles of composition to his Chinese calligraphic works. At the age of forty, he already ranked among the best and most popular calligraphers of his time.

In 1918 when he was thirty-eight, he took tonsure in Temple *Hupao* in Hangzhou and was converted to Pure Land Buddhism because of his following reasoning:

Pure Land Buddhism is a school of Mahayana Buddhism. It advocates a path of attaining the Western Pure Land through praying to Buddha. Nowadays it is the most popular school, for it applies to people of all levels and benefits all sentient beings. Master Yinguang is dedicated to preaching Pure Land Buddhism. I resolve to devote myself to this Buddhist school as well.³¹

Mahayana Buddhism refers to the path of becoming a Buddha, the one who is completely awakened and able to awaken all sentient beings. It advocates that there are a number of Buddhas, and that every sentient being has Buddhahood.³² To become self-awakened is the first step for those who aspire to become Buddhas. It is a lengthy process to benefit one and the others. One is said to gain infinite merits from Buddhism and attain enlightenment, as long as he practices according to Buddhist

³¹ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 604.

³² Chang, Introduction, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, p. xix.

sutras. To benefit the others aims to save all sentient beings from their sufferings out of compassion.³³ It should be noted that the one who has awakened himself is no longer a sentient being. No individual can become self-awakened in his single lifetime. Nirvana is not the end of this process, but an important means to attain one's rebirth in the lands of utmost bliss, where all sentient beings are kept away from their sufferings and will gain more power when they get reincarnated back to the secular world. They require continuous rebirths and reincarnations to become self-awakened.³⁴ For a Mahayana Buddhist like Hongyi, his monastic life aims to gain his highest goodness through a disciplined Buddhist practice to achieve nirvana.

It is believed that all Buddhas are of the same body and mind, but with different names.³⁵ Pure Land Buddhism advocates an easy path for becoming a Buddha – that is a total dependence on the salvific power of Amitayus Buddha.³⁶ Amitayus Buddha is capable of leading all kinds of beings, lay and Buddhist, good and evil, moral and immoral, to the Western Pure Land, as long as they are mindful of Buddha, when they

³³ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 607.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 606.

³⁵ *The Flower Garland Sutra* says, “Shifang zhu rulai, tonggong yi fashen, yi xin yi zhihui, li wuwei yiran [My translation: All Buddhas from the ten directions are of the same one body, mind and wisdom, and of the same strength and fearlessness as well],” as quoted and interpreted in “Xinjing zhujie [Annotation to *The Heart Sutra*]” by Nan Huaijin, *360doc.com*, November 11 2010, Web (Accessed on July 6 2013). Nan Huaijin (1918-2012), a renowned scholar and spiritual teacher of contemporary China. His “Xinjing zhujie” is only available on the Web.

³⁶ Jeaneane and Merv Fowler, *Chinese Religions*, p. 135.

come to die. The Buddha here is not necessarily Amitayus Buddha, it can be any other Buddha, or even just the “Buddha” as a name. Master Ouyi (1599-1657), an important Pure Land Buddhist, clarified this point and said:

Whether or not one will be reborn in the Western Land depends on whether or not he is mindful of Buddha; the degree of which he will attain birth depends on how sincere he is in his mindfulness.³⁷

The Contemplation Sutra is one of the three essential Pure Land sutras, and it is based on them that Pure Land Buddhism was founded. It says, “Those born in the Western Land are of nine grades,”³⁸ of which the highest grade is for those who can always be mindful of Buddha with their sincerity.³⁹ It is believed that one can gain infinite benefits from hearing the name of the Buddha or just the term *Buddha*. This provides an easy way for Pure Land Buddhists to benefit the others, which is to make themselves known for their virtues by the others in return. People are willing to get close to a respected Buddhist and even if they are unable to concentrate on Buddhism, they will remember the Buddhist. Hongyi paraphrased a sentence from *The Shurangama Sutra* to interpret this point, as he said:

“A person who has been near incense will carry a fragrance on his person.” It is not that he is meant to carry a fragrance, but that the

³⁷ My translation. Shi zhisui, *A mi tuo jing yaojie luezhu* [Annotation to Ouyi’s commentaries on “The Amitayus Sutra”] (Taipei: Jingtu zong wenjiao jijinhui, 2010), p. 94.

³⁸ Numata Center, ed., “The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus Buddha,” p. 92.

³⁹ Ibid.

fragrance comes to him unexpectedly.⁴⁰

Yinguang was Hongyi's mentor and he was a renowned Pure Land Buddhist. He greatly enriched Pure Land Buddhism in theory by adding *The Flower Garland Sutra* and the section of "The Buddhist practice and perfect penetration of Great Strength Bodhisattva" from *The Shurangama Sutra* to the required reading list of Pure Land sutras. *The Flower Garland Sutra* is the longest Mahayana sutra and it expounds the Buddha's fully awakened mind that is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. The heart of the sutra is the idea of "perfect harmony among all differences" that Buddhism embraces and harmonizes all kinds of things in the world of the past, present and future. *The Shurangama Sutra* is considered to best represent the Buddha's wisdom among all Mahayana sutras. It is especially known for its section of "The Buddhist practice and perfect penetration of Great Strength Bodhisattva," an as-told-to account of Great Strength Bodhisattva.⁴¹ Great Strength Bodhisattva is depicted as Right Protector of Amitayus Buddha, in trinity with the latter and his Left Protector *Guanyin* Bodhisattva in the Western Pure Land. He embodies the Buddha's power of wisdom, which paved the easiest way for him to attain enlightenment. He

⁴⁰ Hongyi, "Wanshouyan nianfotang kaitang yanci [The opening statement at Temple Wanshouyan]," as quoted in *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi] by Jin Mei, p. 608. "A person who has been ... unexpectedly" is from *The Shurangama Sutra*, Vol. 5, ed. Buddhist Text Translation Society (Burlingame: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2002), p. 128.

⁴¹ Nan Huaijin, *Lengyan dayi jinshi* [An interpretation of "The Shurangama Sutra"] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001), p. 1, 13-14.

described such a way as follows:

The Buddha asks about perfect penetration. I would select none other than gathering in the six organs through continuous pure mindfulness to obtain samadhi [utmost bliss]. This is the foremost method.⁴²

His “foremost method” could be seen as identical with the “easy path” advocated by Pure Land Buddhism. Besides, he gave a causal explanation of it as follows:

Out of pity for living beings, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions [all Buddhas] are mindful of them as a mother remembers her child. If the child runs away, of what use is the mother’s regard? But if the child remembers his mother in the same way that the mother remembers the child, then in life after life the mother and child will not be far apart. If living beings remember Buddha and are mindful of Buddha, certainly they will see the Buddha now or in the future. They will never be far from the Buddha, and their minds will awaken by themselves, without the aid of expedients.⁴³

The simile of “mother-child” helps to justify Pure Land devotees’ dependence upon Amitayus Buddha for salvation.

Hongyi regarded *The Flower Garland Sutra* as “the supreme among all

⁴² Translation Society, ed., *The Shurangama Sutra*, Vol. 5, p. 65.

⁴³ Ibid.

Buddhist sutras.”⁴⁴ He trained his mind according to the sutra and “chanted one volume of the sutra every day.”⁴⁵ He wrote nine books about the sutra and reiterated, in many of his letters and discourses, the importance of studying and upholding it, and in consequence, he built up a complete theory practice system of it.⁴⁶ *The Shurangama Sutra* was among the first Buddhist sutras he studied and upheld, and accompanied him throughout his entire monastic life. *Bei xin jiao ji* of “悲欣交集,” the main text of his last work is just from this sutra. The fourth part of this chapter will make a special analysis of the influence of the sutra on him and his last work.

Hongyi had a good reputation for his “four-in-one” method of Buddhist practice as well as his contribution to the hermeneutics of Buddhist classics, especially for his interpretation of Vinaya Buddhism. Vinaya Buddhism refers to the regulatory framework of monastic precepts. His “four-in-one” method means to base one’s life on his hope of attaining his rebirth in the Western Pure Land, to base one’s mind training on *The Flower Garland Sutra*, to base one’s daily routine practice on Vinaya Buddhism, and to turn to Confucianism for the convenience of one’s studying and preaching Buddhism. As for Confucianism, Hongyi wrote,

Concerning metaphysics and means of attaining enlightenment,

Buddhist classics are undoubtedly the most detailed ones. However, in

terms of code of ethics and conduct, Confucian classics are especially

⁴⁴ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 574.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

elaborate and more suitable for beginners of Buddhism as we are, though Buddhist classics are also involved in these issues. So we should always use Confucian classics as auxiliary means to preach Buddhism.⁴⁷

He attached great importance to Neo-Confucianism, which is closely related to Buddhism, especially Flower Garland Buddhism.⁴⁸ His father Li Xiaolou was a devotee of Neo-Confucianism and applied it to Li-Family instructions. Influenced by such a family education, Hongyi was devoted to studying Neo-Confucian classics in his secular life and regarded “Cheng-Zhu” teachings as the principal philosophy.⁴⁹ After he converted to Buddhism, he still frequently turned to Neo-Confucianism for the convenience of advocating his Buddhist ideas.

Because of their achievements in Buddhism, Hongyi, Dixian (1858-1932), Yinguang and Taixu (1890-1947), are regarded as four important Dharma masters in

⁴⁷ My translation. Hongyi, “Gaiguo shiyan tan [Of self-correction and experiments],” *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], ed. Zhou Hong, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁸ Jeaneane and Merv Flower, *Chinese Religions*, p. 125. For Neo-Confucianism, see *Ibid.*, pp. 167-94.

⁴⁹ Dai Jiafang. “Lun Hongyi dashi foxue sixiang dui chuantong ruxue de sheru yu yuanrong [An essay on Hongyi’s integration and combination of traditional Confucianism with his Buddhist thinking],” in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [*The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi*], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoliang, p. 130. “Cheng-Zhu” refers to three well-known Masters of Neo-Confucianism: Cheng Yi (1033-1107), Cheng Mingdao (1032-1085), and Zhu Xi (1130-1200).

the history of Chinese Buddhism in the twentieth century.⁵⁰ It is Hongyi's greater influence on and popularity in laypeople that make him the most famous of the four. That owes much to his achievements in Chinese calligraphy after his conversion to Buddhism, in addition to his fame as an artist and art educator in his secular life.

Calligraphy played an important role in Hongyi's monastic life. First, he used it to copy scriptures, which is a required way to benefit oneself, that is to say, to benefit those Mahayana Buddhists who copy them. *Bian zhong bian lun*, a noted hermeneutic treatise about how to practice Mahayana Buddhism, teaches ten methods to acquire and apply Buddhist classics, of which the sutra-copy is listed in the first place. Hongyi studied this treatise and commented on it: "Among the ten methods of Buddhist practice, copying sutra is foremost."⁵¹ Different from daily handwriting practice and calligraphic creation, the sutra-copy is required to be taken seriously and sincerely. Yinguang once noted:

The practice of copying sutras differs from calligraphic creation, in which we concentrate more on expressing emotions and there is no need to write neatly and orderly. It is better to copy sutras in the way the officials take to write memorials, that is, every stroke should be written meticulously with sincerity.⁵²

⁵⁰ Li Muyuan, "Tan Hongyi dashi zhi chujia (daixu) [An essay on Master Hongyi's conversion to Buddhism (Preface)]," p. 1.

⁵¹ My translation. Hongyi dashi quanji bianweihui, ed., *Hongyi dashi quanji di qi juan* [The complete works of Master Hongyi, Vol. 7] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 430.

⁵² My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow:

Writing Chinese characters this way may help to memorize and understand Buddhist classics. To practice sutra-copy as Yinguang advocated will enable one to cultivate an attitude of utmost sincerity and to get benefited from the Buddha's wisdom. An attitude of utmost sincerity is one of the most important merits advocated by Pure Land Buddhism. The karma says that virtue is rewarded and vice punished, so Buddhists are required to strictly follow Buddhist teachings and be circumspect in their every single word and deed at every single moment.⁵³

Secondly, Hongyi used calligraphy to write literary works for the convenience of preaching Buddhism and benefiting laypeople to the largest extent. According to Vinaya Buddhism, art and literature are thought of as mundane cultural forms and only laypeople learn to deal with them. For a monk, he is required to renounce the secular world and concentrate on his bodily and spiritual practice. Hongyi was also a disciple of Vinaya Buddhism. After he converted to Buddhism, he ceased to practice all the secular arts he was familiar with except calligraphy. He once planned not to practice his calligraphy any more. His disciple Fan Gunong suggested that he make good use of his calligraphy to copy Buddhist scriptures and send them around, and that it could be an effective way to convey his Buddhist thinking, for most Chinese

Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], pp. 291-92.

⁵³ Wei Daoru, "Diyizhang, Huayan dianji yu huayan jingxue [Chapter one: Flower Garland classics and their study]," *Zhongguo huayanzong tongshi* [*The general history of Chinese Flower Garland Buddhism*] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2008), p. 5. Also see Raoul Burbaum, "The Deathbed Image of Master Hongyi," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, eds. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), p. 180.

people like to collect and appreciate famous calligraphic works. Hongyi accepted his suggestion and made calligraphy part of his Buddhist practice.⁵⁴ According to his Buddhist faith, his calligraphy was no longer a mundane cultural form, but functioned mainly as an instrument for preaching Buddhism.⁵⁵ To preach Buddhism in a socially accepted way, he also integrated other art forms into his calligraphic works. Being inspired by some Buddhist terms and stories, he sometimes wrote some essays, verses as well as lyrics, and displayed them through his calligraphy. Though he stopped practicing Western painting after he became a monk, he continued to apply its principles of design and composition to his calligraphic works. As Chinese calligraphy is the art of writing Chinese characters, he attempted to develop a new style and made it benefit himself and the others. Hongyi's following words prove this.

In my secular days, I was fond of imitating copies of stone inscriptions and manuscripts. . . . The Buddha is firmly against one's attachment to calligraphic skills and immersion in them. However, if one could develop all the aesthetic potentials of calligraphy, then use his virtuosity to copy Buddhist classics, circulate his copies in the world, and make all sentient beings happy to appreciate them and uphold Buddhist classics, he would benefit himself and the others, and all of them will be

⁵⁴ Pan Liangzhen, "Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi's calligraphy]," *Zhongguo shufa quan* (83): *Li Shutong, Ma Yifu juan* [*The collection of Chinese calligraphic works*, Vol. 83 of *Li Shutong and Ma Yifu*], eds. Liu Zhengcheng and Pan Liangzhen (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 1998), p. 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

on the way to be awakened. If it were the case, it might do no evil.⁵⁶

In China, nearly every educated Chinese practices his handwriting, but not every his handwriting work could be viewed as a calligraphic work with an aesthetic style. A universally acknowledged calligraphic work should and must be based on the artistic tradition of calligraphy and meet the requirements of mainstream writing systems so that both members of the elite and ordinary people would like to appreciate and collect it. Hongyi resorted to Buddhism for its all-embracing nature and took the Buddhist thought of “perfect harmony among differences” as his guiding principle of calligraphy. Moreover, he followed Yinguang’s instruction on his previous personal styles. Meanwhile, in accordance with the artistic tradition of calligraphy, he integrated five canonical types and classical models of different eras into one style. That is his best-known “Hongyi-style,” which came out around 1927 when he was turning fifty.⁵⁷ In the following years, he used his style to create a great number of calligraphic works and sent them to his friends and some celebrities and Buddhists. His calligraphic works helped him build a large social circle of various people and win a high reputation, making him the most famous calligrapher at the time. The appearance of “Hongyi-style” pushed forward the development of the calligraphy art and enriched the theory of Chinese calligraphy.

⁵⁶ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong’s teachings on the art*], p. 157.

⁵⁷ Jiang Fapu, “Jingzhan wulun de shenpin, fangbian duzhong de fashi: ye tan Hongyi dashi de shufa yishu [Consummate masterpieces, Buddhist artifacts for salvation: an essay on Master Hongyi’s calligraphic art], p. 305.

Throughout his monastic life, he strictly followed and strongly advocated a principle that “A Buddhist should be known for his virtues but not for his calligraphic works.”⁵⁸ In 1933, too many people came to him for his calligraphic works rather than his preaching Buddhism, and his disciple Ye Qingyan was worried about it. To calm him down, Hongyi said to him:

My calligraphy is tantamount to my Buddhist belief. There is no
need to distinguish between the two.

It is probable that he was known as a calligrapher more than as a Buddhist during his initial period after he became a monk, but his two identities gradually became one along with his Buddhist and calligraphic achievements. “Hongyi-style” was gradually and finally accepted as a Buddhist style when it became more and more stable, mature and popular as time went by.

He always advocated that the perfect calligraphy be based on the study of Buddhism. He said,

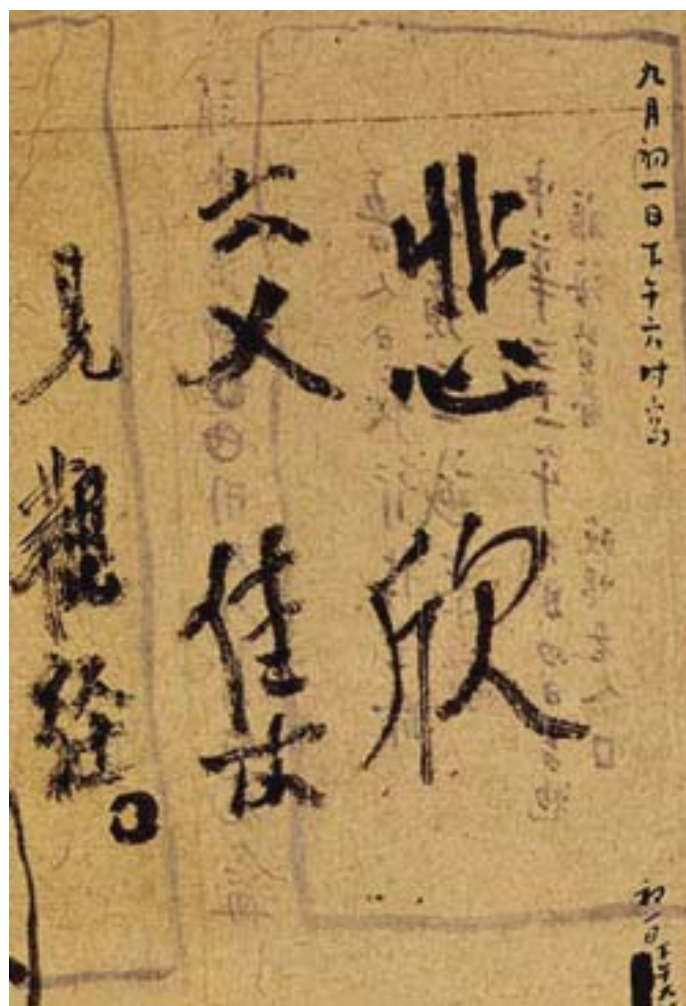
I think the best calligraphy originates from Buddhism. Only through
constant study of Buddhism can we get to the highest level. One ounce of
progress in Buddhism leads to one ounce of progress in calligraphy.⁵⁹

Bei xin jiao ji is his last calligraphic work, which was written three days before his nirvana and takes its name from its main text of “悲欣交集” (*Bei xin jiao ji*). In terms of calligraphic style, it is remarkably different from any of his previous works, but

⁵⁸ My translation. Xing Chi, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], p. 193.

⁵⁹ My translation. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

reminiscent of all his well-known personal styles of different periods. Technically, it has reached the highest level of Chinese calligraphy. A calligraphic work is not simply an artistic creation, but fully displays the thought of its calligrapher also. What makes *Bei xin jiao ji* his best calligraphic work and even the one among the best in the history of Chinese calligraphy lies in that it incarnates the ultimate state a Pure Land Buddhist could have ever achieved in his single lifetime.



1.1

Fig. 1.1 Hongyi's last calligraphic work of *Bei xin jiao ji* [“A mixture of joy and sorrow”]. Dated on 13 October, 1942. Preserved in Yuanming jiangtang [Temple named “Enlightenment”], Shanghai.

Part 2 Context and theme

Nirvana is the most important thing in a Pure Land aspirant's life. Hongyi noted that:

As a practitioner of Pure Land Buddhism, we take the entry into the Western Pure Land as the foremost cause in our lifetime. All the other causes are secondary. When it is time to pass away, just pass away. We must not linger on unfinished causes like preaching Buddhism and show any feeling of attachment to them.⁶⁰

Buddhism is based on the belief of causality. All one has done in his lifetime is taken together as the cause that determines his final achievement, which, in Pure Land Buddhism, is closely related to the grade in the Western Pure Land. Due to this cause, Pure Land Buddhists are required to cultivate an attitude of utmost sincerity in every single cause in his monastic life, especially when they come to die, as Yinguang said that:

All the other things in one's life could be carelessly taken, but solely the things at the end of his life could not be carelessly taken. To die comfortably means to die with joy from his intrinsic heart. It depends on how he treats his Buddhist practice. Every moment of his Buddhist practice, like chanting sutras or praying to Buddha, should be taken with

⁶⁰ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 618.

sincerity. With sincerity, even if he could not gain all the merits advocated in sutras, his acquirement through Buddhist practice would still be miraculous. Without sincerity, his Buddhist practice would be the equivalent of acting -- joys and sorrows are all acts, not from his intrinsic heart. In this case, the merits he seems to have gained would be all but illusions.⁶¹

Hongyi copied this passage for his disciple Huang Fuhai half a year before his nirvana when he had predicted his passing. His last year was dedicated to bringing an end to his secular affairs and preparing for his nirvana.⁶² With particular attention to the integrity at his last time, he designed his last days in conformity with relevant regulations of Pure Land Buddhism.⁶³ Every single cause in his last days turned into an endeavour to guarantee himself a higher grade in the Western Pure Land. Meanwhile, it served as a means of preaching Buddhism for the benefit of the others. This is revealed in his last words on the day of his nirvana as follows:

With a decline of my energy and occasional ailments, I'm getting worse these years and survive till now. Meanwhile, I got chances to preach Buddhism. But this time I really have to pass away, I have sensed this. I could hardly complete my causes of preaching Buddhism. However, if we aspire to complete our causes, we must attain rebirth in the land of utmost

⁶¹ My translation. Ibid., p. 663.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 630-31.

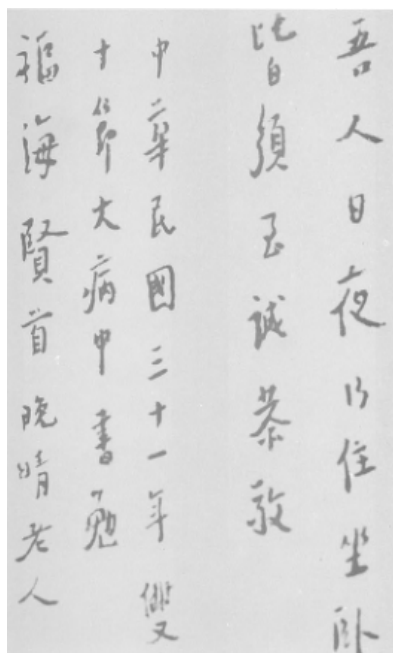
⁶³ Ibid., p. 669.

bliss as soon as possible. Only when we have been empowered by the Buddha and return to the secular world can we fulfill our unfinished causes.⁶⁴

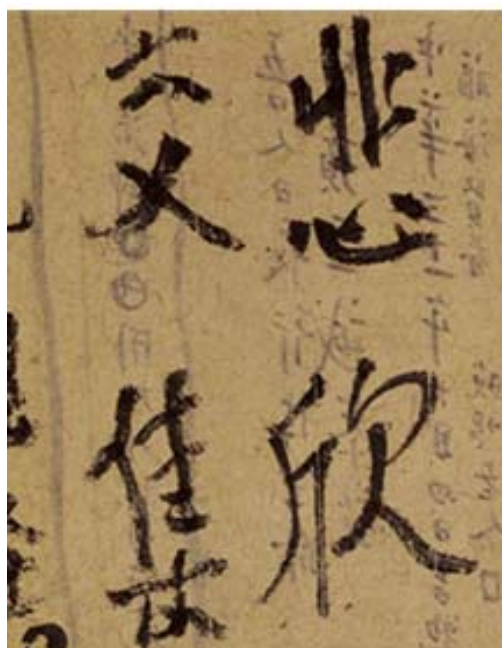
As the foremost method of Buddhist practice and an instrument for preaching Buddhism, calligraphy accompanied Hongyi until his last days. *Bei xin jiao ji* was composed on the second day after he made a detailed plan for his nirvana and funeral. He entrusted his assistant Miaolian with it and an inscription for his disciple Huang Fuhai (Fig. 1.2), which was made earlier on the same day.⁶⁵ Though they do not appear in the written plan, as far as the time of creation is concerned, both of these calligraphic works have to be part of his plan for passing away. What seems contingent is that the paper in use for his last work is the one he used to make a draft for this inscription. The draft with an important teaching of Ouyi's was carefully designed, and the *Bei xin jiao ji* was written on the paper's back and appears in harmony with the draft shown on the paper back. In light of this, each and every detail in his last work must have been meticulously deliberated. Furthermore, from the standpoint of *Huixiang* [to transfer the merits gained through Buddhist practice to the others], and compared with the inscription that was written for a specific person – Huang Fuhai, *Bei xin jiao ji* was not at all written for any one. It could be regarded as a calligraphic work whose audience are all sentient beings. In other words, Hongyi aimed to transfer his Buddhist merits to all sentient beings by means of his last work.

⁶⁴ My translation. Ibid., p. 618.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 670.



1.2



1.3

Fig. 1.2 Hongyi's inscription for Huang Fuhai. Dated on 13 October 1942.

Fig. 1.3 The draft shown on the paper back was made for Hongyi's inscription (Fig. 1.2).

Traditionally, a calligraphic work consists of literary content and artistic form.⁶⁶ Hongyi's previous works of his copied sutras or written literary works, in "Hongyi-style" or his other personal styles, emphasized either their content or form to a degree to meet the interests of different audiences. They merely serve, on the whole, to transmit as many as possible his merits gained by his Buddhist practice. However, his *Bei xin jiao ji* alone can serve the purpose completely and both its content and form play equally important roles in the realization of his final goal of nirvana. To attain his rebirth on the highest grade in the Western Pure Land and thus to benefit himself, he is required to have his last work based on the relevant requirements, as depicted in *The*

⁶⁶ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*], pp. 31-32.

Contemplation Sutra as follows:

Those who attain their rebirth on the highest level of the highest grade are sentient beings who resolve to be born in that land again, being awakened by the three kinds of Buddhist faith and thus, are born there. . . . The first is the sincere faith, the second is the deep faith [the sincere and deep faith together refer to an attitude of utmost sincerity]; and the third is the faith in one's rebirth there by transferring one's merits. . . . Besides, there are three other kinds of sentient beings who also can get born again. . . . They are those who have a compassionate heart, abstain from killing and observe the Buddhist precepts, those who chant the Mahayana sutras of greater scope; and those who practice the six forms of mindfulness [which refers to one's continuous mindfulness of Buddha with utmost sincerity]. They aspire to be born again in that Buddha-land by transferring the merits gained by their Buddhist practice [*Huixiang*].⁶⁷

It is based on the idea of *Huixiang* that Hongyi kept his preaching Buddhism till his last moment in order to benefit the others. In accordance with Pure Land Buddhism, "to benefit the others" consists in leading all sentient beings to the Western Pure Land. Since Hongyi always took his calligraphy as an instrument for preaching Buddhism, he would more expect his last work to be acceptable and applicable to all sentient beings and to teach them how to get to the Western Pure Land. Such methods are clearly summarized into the "pure karma," as described in *The Contemplation Sutra* as

⁶⁷ Numata Center, ed., "The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus Buddha," p. 91.

follows:

Whoever wishes to be born again there should practice the three acts of the merits: first, caring for one's parents, attending to one's teachers and elders, compassionately refraining from killing, and doing the ten good deeds; second, taking the three refuges, keeping the various precepts and refraining from breaking the rules of conduct; and third, awakening aspiration for enlightenment, believing deeply in the law of causality, chanting the Mahayana sutras and encouraging people to follow their teachings. These three are called the pure karma.⁶⁸

Covering all the good causes in the secular world, the pure karma is said to be practiced by all the Buddhas of the past, present and future as the right cause of enlightenment.⁶⁹ The temporal dimension of the pure karma is based on the belief that there are a number of Buddhas and all sentient beings are with Buddhahood. It should be noted that the attainment of one's rebirth on the highest grade is merely theoretical, because no individual, even an accomplished Pure Land Buddhist, could have completely met the requirements of the pure karma.⁷⁰ With an aim to get to a higher grade in the Western Pure Land, Pure Land Buddhists like Hongyi unrelentingly hold themselves to the requirements of the "pure karma," have "an attitude of the utmost sincerity," and nurse "an aspiration to get to the Western Pure land." What these three

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], pp. 604-605.

notions contain will be the theme of Hongyi's last work and the merits he aims to transfer on his deathbed. Furthermore, these merits correspond to the heart of Pure Land Buddhism and they are the main content for all his calligraphic works, and for all the existing calligraphic works in history we could find by far.

Part 3 Content and form

The extraordinary Buddhist theme of Hongyi's last work was represented in an extraordinary way. A variety of graphic elements were used as part of its literary content to complement the written words, and as part of its artistic form to perfect its composition, which Hongyi considered the most important component in a calligraphic work. Thus, his last calligraphic work turns out to be a unity of literature, calligraphy and drawing, instead of a unity of literature and calligraphy as his previous calligraphic works usually were. In traditional China, scholars and government officials had to practice calligraphy for their daily work and they played a very important role in its development. In their eyes, calligraphy was the supreme art and its mastery was a must for the literati and political elite at all levels. Some famous civil officials like Chu Suiliang (596-658) and Liu Gongquan (778-865) were invited to transcribe some well-known Buddhist classic and contemporary texts. These texts had good calligraphic contents. Most of them were written in classical Chinese by the literati and were considered as the works of philosophy and literature. For the well-educated elite and Buddhists, these Buddhism-themed calligraphic works are both the masterworks of calligraphy and Buddhist classics. To some extent, the calligraphic art and Buddhist literature belong to the elite culture and better serve the well-educated Chinese including the literati and Buddhist Masters.

Compared with Chinese calligraphy and Buddhist literature, drawing including

Chinese traditional painting was more popular among Chinese people of different classes and educational levels, and nearly everyone could paint some pictures. Chinese painting and Western painting are quite different. According to Hongyi, Western painting is based on scientific principles like the principle of perspective and it emphasizes accuracy and simplicity in representing things in order to convey human thoughts more immediately and efficiently. He wrote that:

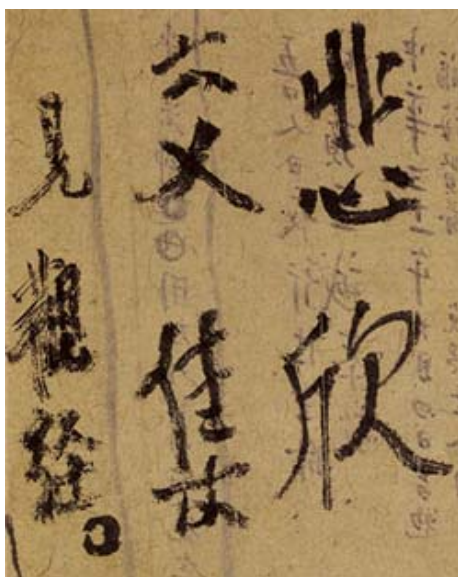
Sometimes, the spoken and written words themselves are not enough to express a complete thought. What could make it complete is drawing. Drawing can show its form and shape in a simple and precise way. When some complicated human thoughts and feelings are to be dealt with, drawing can be used to show them in such a way that people could feel them at one glance. . . . Drawing can most affect people's temperaments and lead them to a sublime and beautiful realm.⁷¹

In Hongyi's last work, the written words and graphic elements on both sides of the paper work together serving as its literary content, while both the newly written characters and the composition serve as the artistic form. Drawing as part of the form helps to make the most of the draft shown on the paper back and harmonize the visual elements on both sides of the paper. And what is more, drawing as part of the content also helps to fully and exactly present the heart of Pure Land Buddhism with the least characters and in a more appealing way. As a result, the drawing unifies the content

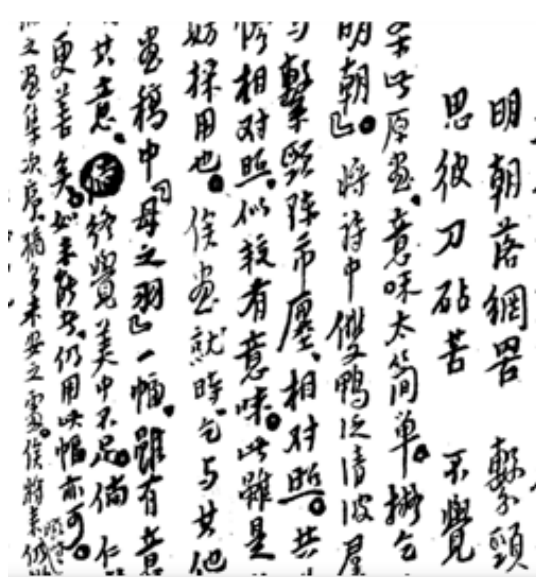
⁷¹ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], p. 91.

and form of his last work. Both its content and form play equally important roles to reveal the extraordinary Buddhist theme and to incarnate Hongyi's achievements both in Buddhism and in calligraphy.

Part 4 Main content



1.4



1.5

Fig. 1.4 Main content of *Bei xin jiao ji*, including two groups of characters and a circle.

Fig. 1.5 Hongyi's manuscript of a letter about the publication of *Husheng huajia* [Album named "Protection of life"].

Two groups of words and a small circle form together the main content of Hongyi's last work. *Bei xin jiao ji* of “悲欣交集,” the four large Chinese characters in the middle mean “a mixture of joy and sorrow”. *Jian guan jing* of “見觀經,” the three middle-sized characters are vertically written on the left column and mean “seeing *Contemplation Sutra*.” These two groups and the circle were presented in a form of hermeneutics, which Hongyi first proposed, strictly practiced and strongly advocated. In his monastic life, he did a massive hermeneutic research on Buddhist classics, most of which had not been punctuated and had been presented with various textual errors. For the convenience of reading and studying them, he corrected their errors,

punctuated the text with circles or other graphic signs, copied the revised text, and wrote his own comments along side the revised text. He summarized this form of hermeneutics as follows:

Copying the text, writing comments, and using graphic signs, none
is indispensable.⁷²

Additionally, he took this form of hermeneutics as a proper form of writing, which was applicable to all domains, and applied it to his ordinary writing. Fig. 1.5 of a letter about the publication of *Husheng huaji* [Album named “Protection of life”] exemplifies this.⁷³ In his last work, *Bei xin jiao ji* serves as the text, *Jian guanjing*, the comments, and the circle, the graphic sign. Such a writing form formally unifies these three parts with different focuses.

Bei xin jiao ji is a Buddhist term from the sixth volume of *The Shurangama Sutra*. The original paragraph containing it is as follows:

Ananda straightened his robes and then bowed in the midst of the
assembly and placed his palms together. The tracks of his mind were
perfectly clear, and he felt a mixture of joy and sorrow [*Bei xin jiao ji*]. His
intent was to benefit beings in the future as he made obeisance and said to
the Buddha, ‘Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, I have already
awakened and attained this Dharma-door for becoming a Buddha, and I

⁷² My translation. Jin, Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], pp. 578-79.

⁷³ Hongyi, *Husheng huaji* [The album named “Protection of life”], illus. Feng Zikai, ed. Xu Shizhong (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005).

can cultivate in it without the slightest doubt.⁷⁴

Ananda was the most trusted assistant of Gautama Buddha, the Buddha of the secular world, who lived in as early as sixth century BC and founded Buddhism. He was committed to collecting the Buddha's teachings and became self-awakened after his nirvana. As depicted in *The Shurangama Sutra*, he became awakened and attained the "Dharma-door for becoming a Buddha" after he had listened to twenty-five accomplished Bodhisattvas' teachings. But the last two of them, Great Strength Bodhisattva and *Guanyin* Bodhisattva, appeared most important.⁷⁵ The former best embodied the Buddha's power of wisdom, and the latter, the Buddha's compassion. In his discourse of "Explaining ten questions in Buddhism," Hongyi pointed out that Mahayana Buddhism was founded on the basis of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion.⁷⁶ Accordingly, various Mahayana schools can be thought to attribute to the teachings of these two Bodhisattvas, and the "Dharma-door of becoming a Buddha," the path of achieving the Buddha's wisdom and compassion. And *Bei xin jiao ji* of "a mixture of joy and sorrow" could be considered to incarnate Ananda's tracks of mind, which were perfectly clear both when he realized this path and had

⁷⁴ Buddhist Text Translation Society, ed., *The Shurangama Sutra*, Vol. 6 (Burlingame: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2002), p. 37.

⁷⁵ Jingkong Fashi [Dharma Master Jingkong], "Dashizhi pusa nianfo yuantong zhang qinwen ji [An interpretation of the section of 'The Buddhist practice and perfect penetration of Great Strength Bodhisattva']," *Bfnn.org*, n.d, Web (Accessed on July 8, 2013). Master Jingkong (b. 1927), a well-known contemporary monk of Pure Land Buddhism. Most of his discourses are recorded and published online.

⁷⁶ Hongyi, "Fofa shiyi lueshi [Explaining ten questions in Buddhism]," p. 82.

attained it.

Ananda benefited from the direct teachings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. This enabled him to simultaneously awaken and attain the “Dharma-door of becoming a Buddha” and to get self-awakened immediately after his nirvana. However, things turn out to be different in the Age of Dharma Decline, one of the three Ages of Buddhism.⁷⁷ It is supposed to begin two thousand years after Gautama Buddha’s passing and last for ten thousand years. During this degenerate age, it is believed that the teachings of the Buddha will still be correct, but people will no longer be capable of attaining enlightenment as a result of their own efforts in a single lifetime.⁷⁸ In *The Shurangama Sutra*, the account of *Guanyin* Bodhisattva, following that of Great Strength Bodhisattva, is put in the last but the most important place, but his way of Buddhist practice is thought to be too austere to follow, especially in the Age of Dharma Decline.⁷⁹ Whereas, Great Strength Bodhisattva provides an easy and effective way to be awakened, which seems to be tailor-made for this degenerate age. His teachings coincide with the essence of Pure Land Buddhism and justifies its *raison d’être*. For this reason, he has been regarded as the honorable founder of Pure

⁷⁷ The first two Ages are the Age of Right Dharma, followed by the Age of Semblance Dharma. See Hattori Sho-on, *A Raft from the Other Shore: Honen and the Way of Pure Land Buddhism* (Tokyo: Jodo Shu Press, 2001), pp. 15-16. The Age of Dharma Decline is also known as “The Latter Days of the Law.” See Jeaneane and Merv Flower, *Chinese Religions*, pp. 133-34.

⁷⁸ Jeaneane and Merv Flower, *Chinese Religions*, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Jingkong Fashi [Master Jingkong], “Lengyanjing li hancang de xuanji jiushi jingtu [The mystery hidden in *The Shurangama Sutra* is Pure Land Buddhism],” *Xuefo.net*, June 15 2013, web (Accessed on July 7 2013).

Land Buddhism. From this perspective, the “Dharma-door of becoming a Buddha” in the Age of Dharma Decline could be understood as the “easy path” advocated by Pure Land Buddhism. The total dependence on the salvific power of Amitayus Buddha will lead to perfectly clear tracks of mind. Hongyi noted that

Every time we are mindful of Buddha, if we only call “homage to
Amitayus Buddha,” we will be cleansed of infinite evils and gain infinite
merits.⁸⁰

In the Age of Dharma Decline, it is not possible to realize and attain the “easy path” at the same time. According to Hongyi, one can realize the path to cultivate himself as long as he prays to Buddha in any form and at any time, but cannot truly attain it until his nirvana. For Pure Land Buddhists, especially those who aspire after a higher grade in the Western Pure Land, they are required to keep their tracks of mind perfectly clear throughout their entire monastic life. In light of this, *Bei xin jiao ji* incarnates an ideal mindset of Pure Land Buddhists. It should be noted that *Bei xin jiao ji* (“a mixture of joy and sorrow”) originally refers to Ananda’s outward expression when he had perfectly clear tracks of mind. It owes largely to the teaching of Great Strength Bodhisattva, which could be considered as the intension of *Bei xin jiao ji* (“a mixture of joy and sorrow”).

Looking back on Hongyi’s monastic life, we could find that he had an indissoluble bond with Great Strength Bodhisattva and *The Shurangama Sutra*. The

⁸⁰ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 609.

Shurangama Sutra was one of the first Buddhist classics he studied not long before he converted to Buddhism. He took tonsure on July 13 of 1918 in the lunar calendar, which was the anniversary of Great Strength Bodhisattva. On the second day, he copied the whole section of “The Buddhist practice and perfect penetration of Great Strength Bodhisattva” for his friend Xia Mianzun (1886-1946). Having admired Yinguang’s achievements in Buddhism, he compiled *Essays of Master Yinguang* in 1920, and became Yinguang’s solely admitted disciple in 1923 after he constantly pleaded with the latter. Yinguang regarded the section about Great Strength Bodhisattva as the “fifth Pure Land sutra,” and praised it as “the Buddha’s best teaching.”⁸¹ Moreover, he attached great importance to the whole text of *The Shurangama Sutra*, which he thought provided a sound ground for people to practice and preach Pure Land Buddhism. He claimed that:

For those who have not known Pure Land Buddhism, when they read *The Shurangama Sutra*, they will benefit from the primary power of the Buddha’s wisdom and they will be awakened to aspire to practice Pure Land Buddhism. For those who have known Pure Land Buddhism, when they read *The Shurangama Sutras*, they will benefit from its best guidance

⁸¹ My translation. Huo Lian, “Yinguang dashi yu Hongyi dashi de jingtu yuan [The relationship between Yinguang and Hongyi based on Pure Land Buddhism],” *Honghua* [Promoting morality], No. 1 (2008), n. pag, *Honghua she*, Web (Accessed on April 6, 2012). *Honghua* is an electronic journal sponsored by *Huonghua she*, a Buddhist community initiated by Master Yinguang in 1930.

and resolve to preach Pure Land Buddhism.⁸²

As Yinguang's admirer and disciple, Hongyi is reckoned to be a determined advocator and practitioner of the "fifth Pure Land sutra" and the whole *Shurangama Sutra*. The former corresponds to the "intension" of *Bei xin jiao ji*, "a mixture of joy and sorrow," and the latter could be taken as the whole story behind this term. Considering that Hongyi was known for his attitude of utmost sincerity, we have reasons to believe that when he used a Buddhist term, he had known it well and accepted its particular context and meaning.

It was not the first time he used *Bei xin jiao ji* in his discourses and writings. What is more, he valued this term so much that it accompanied almost his entire monastic life from the second month after his tonsure to the third day before his nirvana. In 1924, for the first time he used this term in his own work to summarize his monastic life in 1918 as follows:

I took tonsure and became a monk in July of 1918. In September I began to observe monastic precepts. Ma Yifu (1883-1967) gave me two Buddhists classics and one was *Pini shiyi jiyao* [*Instructions on monastic precepts and ceremonies*] by Lingfeng [Master Ouyi] and the other was *Baohua chuan jie zhengfan* ["The canon of monastic precepts" compiled by Baohua]. After reading and marking these works again and again, I felt a mixture of joy and sorrow [*Bei xin jiao ji*] and vowed to study and

⁸² My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 182.

practice Vinaya Buddhism.⁸³

In 1926, when compiling *The chronicle of Master Ouyi*, which contained only some nine thousand characters, he selected the only two sections that contained the term of *Bei xin jiao ji* from Ouyi's works of hundreds of millions of characters. According to the contemporary historian Wan Li, Ouyi was the other person who used *Bei xin jiao ji* more than once in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In 1652, he used it twice in his two successive works.⁸⁴ In Hongyi's last year, this term appeared in his detailed plan made two days before his last work. The sentence with it is as follows:

If you see my tears dropping when you are chanting Buddhist sutras
for me, please don't misunderstand the reason of my tear drops. That is
only because I am feeling a mixture of joy and sorrow [*Bei xin jiao ji*].⁸⁵

This is the last time he used this term in his last calligraphic work. It was done three days before his nirvana. Before he did it, he had entirely stopped eating for four days. This time he wrote the four characters of *Bei xin jiao ji* as the main text of his last work and he did it twice to complete the whole work and between the two times there were three hour intervals. After writing the four words, he stayed in bed until his

⁸³ My translation. Wan Li. "Cong 'bei xin jiao ji' kan Hongyi fashi yu Ouyi zhixu de foxue yuanyuan yu lujing [Viewing the Buddhist relationship between Hongyi and Ouyi by comparison of their uses of *Bei xin jiao ji*]," *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* [*World religions and cultures*], No. 6 (2010), p. 34.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁵ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 669.

nirvana.⁸⁶ It seems that he exhausted his strength to finish his last calligraphic work.

In accordance with *Huixiang, Bei xin jiao ji* as the main text of his last work is supposed to fully display the most important merits he had gained by his Buddhist practice and aspired to transfer to all sentient beings. Owing to the ambiguity of Chinese ideographic characters, the four characters of “悲欣交集” are capable of conveying more than “a mixture of joy and sorrow,” as they are expressed in the English version of *The Shurangama Sutra*. Each character of the four could be perceived to have its own meaning and the four characters perform together to have fully revealed his mindset from his awakening of the “dharma-door of becoming a Buddha” to attaining it in the Age of Dharma Decline.

Bei of “悲,” the first word of *Bei xin jiao ji*, corresponds to a great compassionate heart (“大悲心,” *Da bei xin*), which is for the salvation and benefit of all sentient beings. It is essential to Mahayana Buddhists and distinguishes them from Hinayana ones who are seeking self-enlightenment and devote only to benefiting themselves. In the Age of Dharma Decline, no individual can become self-awakened in a single lifetime, and both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhists are on the way to become self-awakened. So it is particularly important in this special era for Mahayana Buddhists to be worthy of their names by awakening their great compassionate heart. Hongyi noted that:

Mahayana Buddhism is based on the great aspiration for enlightenment [also termed “the aspiration for becoming a Buddha”]. The

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 670.

aspiration for enlightenment refers to having a compassionate heart to benefit all sentient beings. So Mahayana Buddhists should always be positively compassionate, vow to save all sentient beings, and strive to do good to all sentient beings. Only in this way can we prove ourselves worthy of the title of Buddhist.⁸⁷

One's clear knowledge of his having a great compassionate heart ensures his being on the right path of becoming a Buddha to benefit all sentient beings. It also leads to a proper understanding of Pure Land Buddhism. According to this Buddhist school, every one can attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land when he comes to die as long as he is mindful of Buddha. The "easy path" made Pure Land Buddhism the most popular school in modern China, but also caused many people to ignore its being a Mahayana school. They considered it a self-interested school related to death and even labeled it "negative," "pessimistic" and "seeking death." Facing this situation, Hongyi noted that:

A Pure Land Buddhist especially should first awaken one's aspiration for becoming a Buddha. . . . The great compassionate heart is essential to Buddha. Pure Land Buddhism is based on the aspiration for becoming a Buddha. So a Pure Land Buddhist should first awaken one's compassionate heart, vowing to save all sentient beings. Otherwise, others

⁸⁷ My translation. Hongyi, "Fofa dayi [The tenor of Buddhism]," *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], ed. Zhou Hong, pp. 120-21.

would consider Buddhism to be a path of seeking to die.⁸⁸

He stressed the importance of awakening one's great compassionate heart to rehabilitate Pure Land Buddhism.

Xin of “欣” refers to one's joy when he is suffering on behalf of sentient beings of the present and future, due to his having a great compassionate heart. It is believed that in the secular world of the Age of Dharma Decline, the society has become totally corrupt and full of all kinds of evils, because of human's decadence, and all sentient beings are suffering from these evils.⁸⁹ In this degenerate age of ten thousand years, the great compassionate heart manifests itself as a great vow to save all sentient beings of the present and future from suffering, and all Mahayana Buddhists are required to take the great vow. Hongyi claimed that:

As long as the evils of all sentient beings are not eliminated, I will not leave this world of evils and resolve to take on sufferings of all sentient beings, as I vowed at my conversion. Though it would take an extremely long term, I can do it without any regret, any fear, or any aversion. What's more, I should be extremely happy and dedicate myself to this enterprise for the benefit of all sentient beings.⁹⁰

There are various explanations for his becoming a monk. But it is more agreed that his

⁸⁸ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 609.

⁸⁹ Jeaneane and Merv Flower, *Chinese Religions*, p. 134.

⁹⁰ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 610.

conversion to Buddhism is due to his failure to save his country and his people, and his aspiration for salvation. His secular life (1880-1918) coincided with what is termed China's first democratic revolution from the first opium war in 1840 to the May-fourth movement in 1919. It was a period of unrest and upheaval, full of wars, reforms and revolutions. The Chinese people with lofty ideals were dedicated to seeking ways to save their country in turmoil and their people in an abyss of misery; Hongyi was one of them.⁹¹ We have his three recorded attempts to show this. First, influenced by the idea of saving the nation through industries, he thought that mining was the best way to benefit the nation, but he did not put it into practice.⁹² Secondly, he was among those who first received new ideas from Western civilization, he took part in the movement of constitutional reform and modernization in 1898 led by Kang Youwei (1858-1927), and claimed that Kang was his leader.⁹³ But this movement ended in failure.⁹⁴ His last attempt was to save his country through aesthetic education. It made him a well known artist and art educator, but he failed to awaken the public to save the nation as he planned.⁹⁵ At the time of his disillusionment, Mahayana Buddhism showed him a path of becoming a Buddha. It is a path of saving

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 209-10.

⁹² Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], p. 9.

⁹³ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 628.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-12.

the secular world of the past, present and future, which definitely includes his country and his people. *The Shurangama Sutra*, *The Flower Garland Sutra* and *Awakening faith to all Mahayanas* were among the first Buddhist classics he learned.⁹⁶ They theoretically demonstrate Mahayana Buddhism, and made him firmly believe that this path was the foremost one that could truly and completely save his country and his people. He followed and advocated it for the rest of his life. For this, he once claimed that:

Don't forget to save our country when being mindful of Buddha.

Don't forget to be mindful of Buddha when saving our country. The

Buddha refers to the awakened one who has awakened the truth. Only

when one has awakened the truth can he resolve to sacrifice himself,

become extremely brave and powerful, and truly save his country. Thus, if

we want to save our country, we must be mindful of Buddha.⁹⁷

His joy arose from the mixture of his sharp disillusionment with his original own ways of salvation and his enlightenment from Mahayana Buddhism. The “easy path” advocated by Pure Land Buddhism is, all the more, the source of his joy in the extremely long term of salvation.

Xin also means one's joy when he attains rebirth in the Western Pure Land, which is completely described in *The Contemplation Sutra*. According to the direct teachings of *Great Strength Bodhisattva* and *Guanyin Bodhisattva*, sentient beings

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 182.

⁹⁷ My translation. Ibid., p. 520.

born on any grade will be greatly happy. Those born on the highest grade are described as follows:

Amitayus releases a great flood of light which illuminates the aspirant's body and, along with the bodhisattvas, extends his hands in welcome. Avalokiteshvara [*Guanyin* Bodhisattva] and Mahasthamaprapta [Great Strength Bodhisattva], together with innumerable bodhisattvas, praise and encourage the aspirant. Seeing this, the aspirant rejoices so greatly as to dance.⁹⁸

And those born on the lowest grade are written as follows:

When the flower opens, Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta teach him with voices of great compassion the method of extinguishing evil karma through the realization of Suchness of all dharmas. Hearing this, he rejoices and immediately awakens aspiration for Enlightenment.⁹⁹

A higher grade in the Western Pure Land means more benefits. Those born on the highest grade will gain the blessing from Amitayus Buddha and innumerable Bodhisattvas. Those born on the lowest grade are said to be “the sentient beings who commit such evils as the five gravest offenses, the ten evil acts and all kinds of immorality.”¹⁰⁰ When born in the Western Pure Land, they will be saved from suffering and simultaneously their aspiration for becoming a Buddha will be

⁹⁸ Numata Center, “The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus Buddha,” p. 92.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

awakened. According to *The Contemplation Sutra*, Pure Land Buddhism is favourable to human beings of all levels. Hongyi thought about this point and wrote,

The Buddha teaches many different paths of seeking enlightenment, complicated and simple, difficult and easy. If we chose a path not in accordance with humanity, we would cost more but gain less. If we chose a path in accordance with humanity, we would cost less and gain more. In the Age of Dharma Decline, only Pure Land Buddhism is most suitable for us. The other paths are too difficult to follow in this world of suffering when Gautama Buddha has passed. If we resolve to practice Pure Land Buddhism, we will benefit from [the Buddha's] great compassion and great strength, and attain rebirth in the land of utmost bliss, where we will see Buddhas, listen to their authentic teaching, and attain enlightenment easily and quickly.¹⁰¹

His last work was written on his deathbed. When he had been born in the Western Pure Land he was feeling greatly happy, in accordance with *The Contemplation Sutra*. From this perspective, the three characters of *Jian guanjing* (“見觀經”) could be understood as “having seen what is depicted in *The Contemplation Sutra*” and are suggestive of the intension of *Xin* of “欣.”

Jiao of “交” and *Ji* of “集” are usually put together to understand. The former refers to inclusion, and the latter, unity. Hongyi's Buddhist ideas found full expression

¹⁰¹ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 608.

in his four-in-one method of Buddhist practice, and his ordinary life was dedicated to all kinds of charitable causes which he regarded as the “resources for attaining to the Western Pure Land.”¹⁰² Moreover, he comprehensively studied various classics of Chinese ten main Buddhist schools, and paid tribute to Medicine Buddha and Earth Treasury Bodhisattva as much as to the three saints in Western Pure Land. Medicine Buddha rules the Eastern Pure Land, and Earth Treasury Bodhisattva takes over the secular world after Gautama Buddha’s passing. The Western and Eastern Pure Lands and the secular world constitute the whole universe of Buddhism. The following passages show some of Hongyi’s relevant teachings.

Since my conversion to Buddhism, I have been devoted to Pure Land Buddhism of Amitayus Buddha and attached to *Yaoshi gongde jing* [*The Sutra of primary vows and merits of Medicine Buddha*] as well.¹⁰³

The practice on Pure Land Buddhism should be based on the three essential Pure Land sutras. In addition to these three sutras, *Dizang jing* [*The Earth Treasury Sutra*] should also be chanted.¹⁰⁴

He encouraged people to study and uphold all kinds of Buddhist classics, and in the meanwhile, instructed them to specialize in Pure Land Buddhism. He reiterated this point in many of his discourses and he did the same thing himself. As seen above, *Jiao* and *Ji* reflect his twenty-four years’ experience and progress in Buddhism.

¹⁰² Hongyi, “Jingtu famen dayi [The tenor of Pure Land Buddhism],” as quoted by Jin Mei in *Ibid.*, p. 610.

¹⁰³ My translation. *Ibid.*, pp. 612-13.

¹⁰⁴ My translation. *Ibid.*, pp. 614-15.

According to Pure Land Buddhism, chanting Buddhist classics is a solemn form of mindfulness of Buddha and embodies an attitude of utmost sincerity. It is required in a Buddhist's everyday life and indispensable at the time of his nirvana. In the latter case, conventionally, it will be done by his assistants. In Hongyi's plan of passing with which he entrusted Miaolian, he wrote,

After chanting the selected chapters of *The Flower Garland Sutra*,
you should chant ten times "Homage to Amitayus Buddha." Then you
chant "Wish your rebirth in the Western Pure Land" and "For the benefit of
all sentient beings."¹⁰⁵

It is easy to see that his foremost moment totally depended on Amitayus Buddha and was closely related to his aspiration for rebirth in the Western Pure Land. *Jianguan* of "見觀經" literally means "seeing *Contemplation Sutra*." It could be that Hongyi led people to *The Contemplation Sutra*. As seen in this sutra, one's rebirth will transform his infinite suffering and sorrow in the secular world into enlightenment and bliss in the Western Pure Land. For a Pure Land practitioner like Hongyi, the rebirth on a higher grade is his ultimate pursuit and the most important milestone in his lifetime. What is more, it will be a higher and more powerful start in his long-term path of becoming a Buddha.

At the time of his disillusionment with the salvation of his country and his people, it was the Buddha's wisdom and compassion that led him to an enlightened "easy path." Then, his mixed feeling of joy and sorrow arose from it. His sorrow and

¹⁰⁵ My translation. Ibid. p. 691.

joy were deeply rooted in his aspiration for becoming a Buddha. A compassionate heart and a deep belief in Buddhism accompanied his entire monastic life. At the foremost moment of his nirvana, he attained rebirth in the Western Pure Land, having seen what is depicted in *The Contemplation Sutra*, and again he felt the mixed joy and sorrow. He grieved for being unable to truly benefit the others during his lifetime, while rejoicing in being able to come back soon with more power for their salvation and more wisdom for their enlightenment. Because of the Buddha's compassion embodied by *Guanyin* Bodhisattva, and the Buddha's wisdom embodied by Great Strength Bodhisattva, he awakened and attained the "dharma-door of becoming a Buddha" as Ananda did. Unlike his first three attempts of salvation, by then how and what he had done by practicing Pure Land Buddhism was proved salvific and practicable, and was summarized as *Bei xin jiao ji* of "悲欣交集" and *Jian guan jing* of "見觀經."

Circles are frequently used in Hongyi's previous works. But it is the first time he did not complete a circle, but drew it with a deliberate little gap. A circle with a gap at the lower left of the page is reminiscent of the imagery of setting sun, which was implied in his pseudonym "Elder in the fading twilight ('晚晴老人,' *Wanqing laoren*)" and was explicit in his last letter to his disciple Li Fangyuan. In the letter he wrote:

I am getting worse these days and will soon attain to the land of
utmost bliss, like a red setting sun gloriously shining and going down to the
west in an instant. I sincerely hope you can continue to do my unfinished

charitable causes, so I will leave without any regrets.¹⁰⁶

Indicating his passing and unfinished causes, the imagery of setting sun embodied his aspiration for nirvana and his great compassion for the sentient beings in suffering.

The aspiration for becoming a Buddha ultimately aims at awakening oneself and the others, and both will be realized through one's disciplined Buddhist practice. In the Age of Dharma Decline, wherein no individual can attain enlightenment as the result of his own efforts in the single lifetime and the ultimate aim turns to be a basic one, which is to attain rebirth in the land of utmost bliss by doing good as much as possible for the benefit of oneself and the others. The disciplined Buddhist practice refers to one's endeavour to make all occasional conditions and causes into the effect and to make them infinitely closest to the basic aim. However, through his total dependence on Amitayus Buddha, a Pure Land Buddhist will get the chance to surpass the basic aim and get closest to the ultimate aim by attaining rebirth on a higher grade, as witnessed in *The Contemplation Sutra*. He is required to be sincere in all conditions and causes. Among them, his nirvana is first and most important, and it will lead him to the Western Pure Land where he can "see Buddhas and listen to their authentic teaching, and attain enlightenment easily and quickly."¹⁰⁷ A circle with a little gap is suggestive of such an easy and effective path. According to Goldstein's theory of design and composition, in the case of a line trying to reach itself, there will be great

¹⁰⁶ My translation. Ibid., p. 668.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 608.

tension in almost, but not quite completing its journey.¹⁰⁸ The principle of closure is at work here: “we want to see the line complete its journey because it makes for a shape, a simpler solution.”¹⁰⁹ The unfinished circular track corresponds to this easy path being closest to the ultimate aim. The tension, owing to the deliberate little gap, reminds of Amitayus Buddha’s salvific power. The circle itself, as a symbol for perfection in Chinese traditional culture, reminds of the imagery of the full moon in Hongyi’s farewell message as follows:

Shared virtues brings friendship. Men of virtue become friends
without the demand for it. If we demand it, the more we seem to get it, the
further we are away from it. You ask me where I am going. I am going to a
land of unspeakable grandeur where the trees are always in vernal blossom
and the moon is always full like the heart of the Buddha that is completely
enlightened.¹¹⁰

The land of unspeakable grandeur is the Western Pure Land, the trees in blossom refer to the blessed beings in this land, and the full moon stands for the complete enlightenment he aspires for. Traditionally in Buddhist culture, *Guanyin* Bodhisattva who embodies the Buddha’s compassion is regarded as the incarnation of the sun, and Great Strength Bodhisattva who embodies the Buddha’s wisdom, the incarnation of the moon. In this sense, the circle signifying the sun and the moon visualizes the

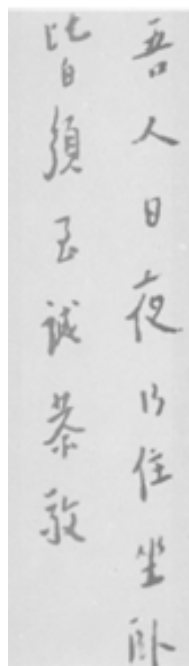
¹⁰⁸ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

¹¹⁰ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 670.

Buddha's compassion and wisdom to show Hongyi's aspiration for religious perfection. His attainment of rebirth is the foremost thing in his lifetime, but it is merely a small step on his extremely long-term path to attain perfection as a Buddha. A circle with a gap helps to express his mixture of joy and sorrow at this special moment.

Part 5 The text shown on the paper back



1.6



1.7

Fig. 1.6 Original text of Ouyi's teaching on back of paper.

Fig. 1.7 Detail of *Bei xin jiao ji* showing the text of Ouyi's teaching.

The words on Fig. 1.6 are just Ouyi's teaching with its literal meaning of "No matter when we walk, stay, sit and sleep, we must always assume an attitude of utmost sincerity ('吾人日夜行住坐臥須至誠恭敬')." The characters "吾人日夜," "誠," and "行" are kept almost intact while the other characters are hidden in different degrees by the two characters of "悲" and "欣," as illustrated by Fig. 1.7. The original meaning of "行" is "to walk," its extended meaning is "to behave" that includes "to walk, stay, sit and sleep." Owing to the ambiguity of Chinese ideographic characters and the intertextuality of Chinese traditional literature, "誠" can express "utmost sincerity" written as "至誠恭敬" in Chinese. "No matter when and how we

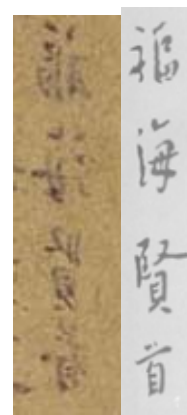
behave, we must assume an attitude of utmost sincerity (吾人日夜誠行)” is sufficient to convey the main idea of this teaching. It is the best summary of what is termed “the foremost method” by Great Strength Bodhisattva as follows:

The Buddha asks about perfect penetration. I would select none other than gathering in the six organs through continuous pure mindfulness to obtain samadhi [utmost bliss]. This is the foremost method.¹¹¹

As aforementioned, “the foremost method” could be understood as the intension of *Bei xin jiao ji*, “a mixture of joy and sorrow.” Now it is expressed by six characters shown on the paper back, as if the intension of *Bei xin jiao ji* were revealed and came to the surface. Hongyi seems to tell his audience that he was always feeling a mixture of joy and sorrow because he assumed an attitude of utmost sincerity no matter when and how he behaved.



1.8



1.9

Fig. 1.8 Character of “勉” shown on the paper back.

Fig. 1.9 Characters of “福海賢首” shown on the paper back.

¹¹¹ Translation Society, ed., *Shurangama Sutra*, Vol. 5, p. 65.

Hongyi admired Ouyi as much as Yinguang. He copied Ouyi's teaching as a mutual encouragement with Huang Fuhai and that could be told from “勉” (*Mian*, “for mutual encouragement,” Fig. 1.8) and “福海賢首” (*Fuhai xianshou*, “to Reverend Fuhai,” Fig. 1.9), which are completely preserved and remain legible in his last work. Ouyi's teaching is simplified into the six characters. They reveal the essence of Pure Land Buddhism in the most concise way, and express Hongyi's gratitude for the Buddha's wisdom and his respect for his predecessors. “To Reverend Fuhai” not only shows Hongyi's consideration for his disciple Fuhai, but also his great compassion for all sentient beings of the present and future. The whole text shown on the paper back seems to be a summary of his experience as a Pure Land Buddhist. He found an enlightened “easy path” of salvation from Pure Land Buddhism, unswervingly followed it under the instruction of his teachers like Ouyi and Yinguang, and proved it to be a right cause of enlightenment with his own experience and feeling in the Western Pure Land. He thought it was time to convey them to his fellow people of the present and future. Thus, the past, the present and the future come into being at one and the same time in his last work. In this way, what is conveyed from the text shown on the paper back corresponds to the “pure karma” that is “practiced by all the Buddhas of the past, present and future as the right cause of enlightenment.”

Part 6 The used piece of paper with *Bei xin jiao ji*

It is well known that Hongyi wrote his last work on a used paper three days before his nirvana. We can't help asking what his motivation was. In reality, his originality lies in his way of expression. He could have done it this way merely because his Buddhist performance has achieved its highest spiritual state and its connotative meaning is far more informative than that the laypeople could think.

In accordance with Buddhism, a monk is required to keep various precepts of which the "Five Precepts" are essential. They are as follows:

1. not killing,
2. not stealing,
3. no improper sexual behavior,
4. no false speech,
5. no consumption of alcohol.¹¹²

Every day, Hongyi, as a monk, cultivated morality by strictly following the precepts advocated by Vinaya Buddhism and he was regarded as one of the monks who observed monastic rules best in the modern history of Chinese Buddhism.¹¹³

His use of the used piece of paper reflects his observance of the precept of not

¹¹² Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 599.

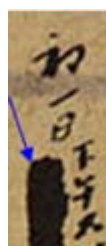
¹¹³ Shi Jiqun, "Hongyi dashi dui luxue de gongxian [Master Hongyi's contribution to Vinaya Buddhism]," in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [*The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi*], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoxiang, p. 25.

stealing. This precept stipulates that a monk is not allowed to possess any personal property except three garments and an earthen bowl, and that any possession without the owner's permission or for a definite reason is an act of stealing.¹¹⁴ Hongyi attached great importance to it and regarded it as the foremost but the most difficult precept to keep. His monastic life expenditure was given partly by the temple where he resided and partly came from the alms of his teachers, friends and disciples. Every time he needed something, he wrote to tell them what he needed and the reasons for his use, and also reported on how he had used them and the balance after their use. The paper he used in his last days was presented by Huang Fuhai. Five months before his last work, he wrote him a letter as follows:

You brought me a lot of paper and told me to use it to make drafts. I should have given back to you the collection of my drafts. But I will pass away soon and have no drafts to make. So I will write for you ten and more teachings of Master Yinguang. . . . A lot of paper you brought remains and some is stored in Tanlin [the name of a place]. But I cannot get there and fetch it now. I hope you could have the rest of paper as alms, so I would not have to return it to you. I am getting older. I hope you could understand me.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], p. 599.

¹¹⁵ My translation. *Ibid.*, p. 662.



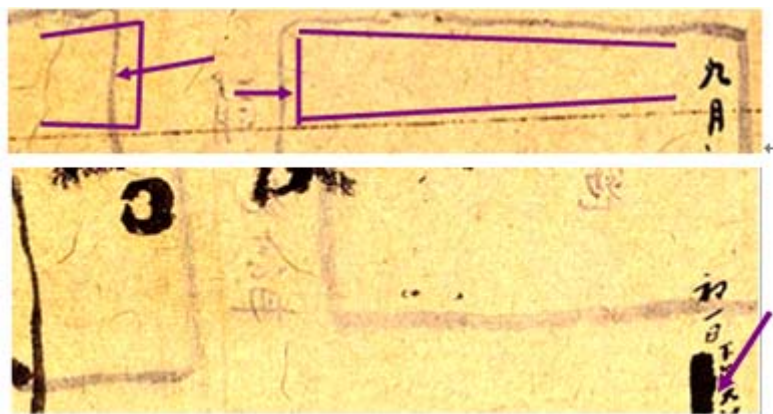
1.10



1.11

Fig. 1.10 and Fig. 1.11 Obvious traces of correction in *Bei xin jiao ji*.

His last work has the name of Huang Fuhai, “福海,” indicating the benefactor of the paper in use. Additionally, he respected Huang for his request that the paper be used to make drafts. There are two obvious traces of correction in his last work: one is in the lower right corner (Fig. 1.10) and the other, in the character “見” (Fig. 1.11). Besides, his design seen on the reverse side of the paper makes his last work more like a script than a formal calligraphic one.

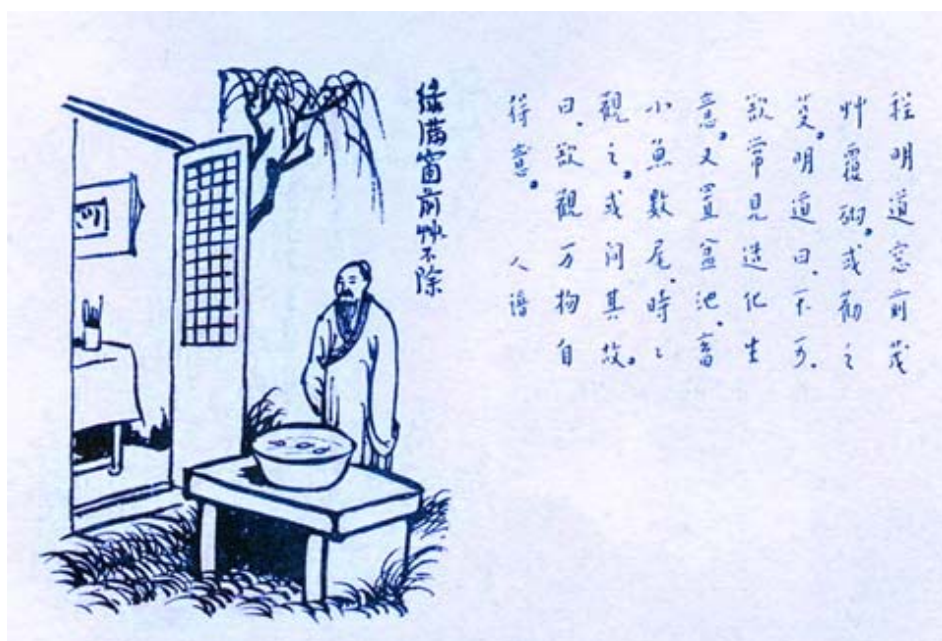


1.12

Fig. 1.12 Details of *Bei xin jiao ji* showing an organized composition.

His design on the paper’s back is clearly seen in his last work. It contains lines, grids of irregular shapes and a lot of traces of correction, as seen in Fig. 1.12. Hongyi drew a straight line on top of the page, a circle with a gap, a double stroke in the lower left corner, a vertical stroke and two little dots. Thanks to these graphic

elements, the irregular shapes are kept in order and seem to produce a regular grid pattern for the characters. The graphic elements in harmony can be easily associated with the imagery of weeds he often used in his literary works. It was attached to his great compassionate heart and found full expression in a set of his three little works including a verse, a couplet and an essay. The verse and essay are collected in the album named “Protection of life,” a well-known Buddhist picture book by Hongyi and his favorite disciple Feng Zikai (1898-1975). The latter is the first Chinese caricaturist. Hongyi wrote Buddhism-themed verses and essays in calligraphy and Feng Zikai drew corresponding illustrations there.



1.13

Fig. 1.13 Illustration with Hongyi's calligraphy and Feng Zikai's drawing from *Husheng huaji* [Album named “Protection of life”]. Dated 1928.

The verse was composed in 1928 for a drawing named “No clearing weeds, because their greenery fills the yard in front of the window” (Fig. 1.13). What was

written there reads as follows:

Weeds grew at will in the yard of Cheng Mingdao [1032-1085].

Someone advised him to clear them. But he refused because he always wanted to see the vitality of the nature. Then he installed a basin in the yard, bred some little fish, and often watched them. Someone asked him the reason, he said, “I would like to see all beings of the nature enjoy themselves.”¹¹⁶

The following is his couplet, which was written in 1933 when he lived in Temple *Cao'an*:

[First line] Let weeds grow at will; they fill the eyes with exuberant vitality.

[Second line] Close the door and watch them growing, but don't forget the people suffering outside.¹¹⁷

When he returned to Temple *Cao'an* in 1938, he interpreted this couplet in an essay as follows:

I wrote this couplet for 'Cao'an' Temple a few years ago. The second half might be cited from an ancient poem, but it might not be. “Fill

¹¹⁶ My translation. The verse was quoted by Zhang Fengtong, “Cong ‘Husheng huaji’ kan Hongyi dashi de foxue sixiang [Hongyi’s Buddhist ideas exemplified in *The album named “Protection of life”*], in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [*The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi*], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoxiang, p. 366.

¹¹⁷ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong’s teachings on the art*], p. 233.

the eyes with exuberant vitality” refers to weeds. The couplet’s first half signifies great compassion and love. Confucian literati of *Song* Dynasty like Zhou Dunru [1081-1159], Zhu Xi [1130-1200] and Cheng Mingdao [1032-1085] always used the imagery of weeds in his verses. These verses embodied their compassion and love for people and fortunes, which arose from their perception of harmony and vitality from the universe and nature.¹¹⁸

Taking these three works together into account, we get a complete story behind the imagery of weeds. The weeds in a yard are usually considered to be unsightly. Most people choose to clear them up to make the yard clean and tidy. However, Cheng Mingdao did not clear the weeds up, but let them grow at will. He installed a basin and bred some fish in it. The yard turned into a harmonious place full of vitality and happiness. He thought about closing the door and living forever in such a place free of suffering. But he clearly knew that there were still a lot of people in suffering just outside the yard. To save them and make an ideal world, he worked out a solution to make an ideal yard for the rest of the world. Having awakened to this, his compassion and love for his people and their fortunes arose spontaneously.

If we replace the name of Cheng with Hongyi, and correlate the story of the weeds with Hongyi’s last performance in his life, we will be able to retrace his tracks of mind while he created his last work. A used piece of paper with a draft shown on the paper back just correlates with the yard of weeds. His newly made drawing and

¹¹⁸ My translation. Ibid.

handwriting correspond to the basin and the fish. He has made the best use of the draft and harmonized all the visual elements as if he created a harmonious yard of vitality and happiness. His last work was composed when he had attained rebirth in the Western Pure Land, where all beings are in harmony and utmost bliss. He certainly had thought about living there forever. But his great compassionate heart reminded him of his country, his people and the sentient beings of the present and future in the Age of Dharma Decline. For their benefit and salvation, he transferred to them the most important merits from Mahayana Buddhism he had practiced and proved right. One of them was the attitude of utmost sincerity. He demonstrated it by seriously treating every detail of his last work and making a perfect harmony among all differences in a used piece of paper.

There is a story behind his taking care of the paper in use. He recalled it in a discourse for young Buddhists as follows:

When I was five, my father died. One day, I was seven then, I was practicing my handwriting, I played with the whole piece of paper without taking care of it. My mother saw this and said severely, ‘My son! You have to know this! When your father was alive, he would not throw away even a slip of paper, let alone such a whole piece of paper you are playing with!’

What my mother meant then is to cherish our fortunes.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ My translation. Hongyi, “Qingnian fojiaotu ying zhuyi zhi sixiang [Four points young Buddhists should pay attention to],” *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], ed. Zhou Hong, p. 47.

His mother was the most important person in his life. It is agreed that his turning to Buddhism was inspired by his mother's death to a large extent.¹²⁰ Even after he became a monk, he still remembered his mother and always referred to her words and deeds in his discourses. His attachment to his mother turned into his devotion to Pure Land Buddhism, so did his love for his country and his people. He once said, "The utmost filial piety is to practice Buddhism with the hope of attaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land."¹²¹ In a memorial service for his mother in 1928, he wrote a calligraphic work as a keepsake of her:

[Main text with two large characters] Decency and Sincerity.

[Annotation with small characters] Under the watchful eyes of others, we

should behave cautiously as if treading on thin ice.¹²²

What he learned from his mother was to cherish fortunes and to be decent and sincere. These merits find full expression in the way he took care of the paper in use.

¹²⁰ Geremie Randall Barme, "Feng Zikai: A Biographical Sketch and Critical Study," *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2002), p. 175.

¹²¹ My translation. Dai Jiafang. "Lun Hongyi dashi foxue sixiang dui chuantong ruxue de sheru yu yuanrong [An essay on Hongyi's integration and combination of traditional Confucianism with his Buddhist thinking]," p. 126.

¹²² My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 587.



1.14



1.15

Fig. 1.14 Hongyi's script of a double stroke in *Bei xin jiao ji*.

Fig. 1.15 Illustration with Hongyi's calligraphy and Feng Zikai's drawing from *Husheng huaji* [Album named "Protection of life"]. Dated 1928.

The double-stroke in the lower left corner (Fig. 1.14) correlates well with the imagery of willow branch and pure water, which he once used in a verse for Feng Zikai's drawing named "A willow branch and pure water" (Fig. 1.15). The verse reads as follows:

A willow branch drips pure water;
Only one drop is enough to cool all;
To keep us away from suffering;
To lead us to the Western Pure Land.¹²³

This verse vividly represents "the easy path" and displays his aspiration for rebirth in

¹²³ My translation. The verse was quoted by Sun Xiaoquan, "Yi yu zhi run, wan hui bing yu [A rain nourishes all creatures]," in *Hongyi dashi jinian wenji* [The festschrift in honor of Master Hongyi], eds. Chen Zhenzhen and Chen Yaoxiang, p. 226.

the Western Pure Land. A willow branch and pure water signifies Amitayus Buddha's salvific power. Traditionally in Buddhist culture, a willow branch is thought of as belonging to *Guanyin* Bodhisattva who uses it for the salvation of sentient beings. To some extent, it embodies the Buddha's compassion. A drop of pure water all the more corresponds to Great Strength Bodhisattva who awakens to the easiest path of seeking enlightenment. Accordingly, it embodies the Buddha's wisdom. In Hongyi's double stroke, the slightly curving line symbolizes the willow branch, and the dot, the drop of pure water. Both the strokes were connected and placed in the lower left corner. It seems that he used them to tell his rebirth and upcoming nirvana, as he did it with the words of *Jian guanjing* and the circle with a gap.

Hongyi was familiar with stories about the Buddha and often used some of them as examples in his discourses. The harmonious layout of his last work is suggestive of a story about the Buddha on his deathbed. The story is as follows:

The Buddha and his monks came to a grove of sal trees in Kushinagar. The Buddha asked Ananda to prepare a couch between two trees, with its head to the north. "I am weary and want to lie down," he said. When the couch was ready, the Buddha lay down on his right side, one foot upon the other, with his head supported by his right hand. Then the sal trees bloomed, although it was not their season, pale yellow petals

rained down on the Buddha.¹²⁴



1.16



1.17



1.18

Fig. 1.16 Stone statue of reclining Buddha. Dated in the 12th century. Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka.

Fig. 1.17 Photograph of Hongyi on his deathbed. Dated on 14 October 1942. Temple *Tiancheng*, Quanzhou.

Fig. 1.18 Hongyi's script of the lower part of the character of “悲.”

When Hongyi's old script is seen on the back of the pale yellow paper, it turns to be

¹²⁴ This abridged account is taken from *The Maha-parinibbana Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha*, ed. Buddhist Publication Society, trans. Sister Vajira and Francis Story (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998), DN 16, PTS: D ii 72.

many stroke shapes of different values. Four lines of characters are orderly arranged to the right. These colors and shapes are easily associated with the bloomed sal trees. The lower part of the character “悲” (Fig. 1.18) is presented in a reclining form, which is suggestive of the posture of reclining Buddha (Fig. 1.16) — the left arm is placed flat along the body, the right arm serves as a pillow with the hand supporting the head. With the help of the photo of Hongyi’s death (Fig. 1.17), we know this is the posture he chose to take when he was passing away. As aforementioned, he foretold his passing a year before his last work. From this perspective, we have reasons to believe that he did foretell, in his last reminiscent work, the posture he would take when he was passing away. And we have reasons to take his last reminiscent work as a picture in which he is lying down in the rain of pale yellow petals as the Buddha.

Chapter II

Hongyi's Buddhist Idea in His Script of *Bei Xin Jiao Ji*

Part 1 A calligraphic style with a form without form

A form without form is an important Buddhist concept. In accordance with Mahayana Buddhism, it incarnates the Buddha's wisdom, and refers to a consummate form that is beyond the human conception and is different from any conceivable form in the worldly sense.¹²⁵ As witnessed in *The Flower Garland Sutra* which is the basis of Hongyi's religious belief, a form without form stresses three aspects of Emptiness: the ego-lessness, the non-clinging and non-abiding, and the all-embracing and non-obstructing. These contents coexist simultaneously in the concept of a form without form. Emptiness is the essence of Buddhism and represents the Buddha's

¹²⁵ Nan Huaijin, "Di'ershi'er pin: Lise lixiang fen [Chapter twenty-two: Removal of color and form in the worldly sense]," *Jingangjing shuo shenme* [What "The Diamond Sutra" is about] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), pp. 332-36. Nan interpreted in this chapter the concept of a form without form, as described in *The Diamond Sutra*. Gautama Buddha teaches about this concept in many of his discourses, which are recorded in different Mahayana sutras, such as *The Diamond Sutra* and *The Flower Garland Sutra*. Although these sutras give different descriptions of it, they express the same idea that it incarnates the Buddha's wisdom and refers to a consummate form beyond human thinking.

wisdom that is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. “Ego-lessness” means to relinquish the idea of “clinging-to-ego,” which is the fundamental obstacle that stands in the way to Emptiness. Based on the “ego-lessness,” the non-clinging and non-abiding are a complete removal of the idea of being and a thorough liberation from clinging to any form of being. The all-embracing and non-obstructing are at the ultimate level of Emptiness and featured by the inclusion of all the beings and the perfect harmony among all their differences. The sutra especially expounds this aspect of Emptiness,¹²⁶ which can be summarized as these: both time and space have lost their meaning and power as a human understands and experiences them;¹²⁷ all sentient beings of past, present and future, conceived in whatever form, simultaneously come into the world and harmoniously coexist in a form without form.¹²⁸

Hongyi used this Buddhist doctrine to guide his calligraphy and wrote that:

Art at its highest level lies in a form without form. If we are aware
of the non-existence of forms, we can do well in art and reach the realm of
Tao [*Tao* in the Buddhist sense means enlightenment].¹²⁹

He put forward a series of Buddhist calligraphic ideas to guide his practice in order to visualize a form without form as it is described in *The Flower Garland Sutra*. He

¹²⁶ Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, p. 12.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

¹²⁹ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], p. 132.

expressed his aspiration to perfect his calligraphic skills and develop all aesthetic potentials of calligraphy in a letter to his disciple Du Shenfu. It is as follows:

In my secular days, I was fond of imitating copies of stone inscriptions and manuscripts. . . . The Buddha is firmly against one's attachment to calligraphic skills and immersion in them. However, if one could develop all the aesthetic potentials of calligraphy, then use his virtuosity to copy Buddhist classics, circulate his copies in the world, and make all sentient beings happy to appreciate them and uphold Buddhist classics, he would benefit himself and the others, and all of them will be on the way to be awakened. If it were the case, it might do no evil.¹³⁰

To have his such wish come true, the calligrapher must master the history of Chinese calligraphy thoroughly, and its canonical types and styles completely so that his calligraphic works will exemplify his perfect mastery of them. In his discourse of "Of the way to practice calligraphy," Hongyi said about this as follows:

The seal script, clerical script and even semi-cursive script, all the types of script must be learnt and mastered. What's more, we should study all the copies of stele inscriptions and manuscripts, at least, browse through these copies.¹³¹

Hongyi thought that one's good mastery of canonical types and styles is the necessary preparation before he forgets all the conceivable calligraphic forms. In a letter to his

¹³⁰ My translation. Ibid., p. 157.

¹³¹ My translation. Ibid., p. 165.

friend Ma Donghan, he wrote,

A normal calligrapher always cares about calligraphic types or techniques, methods of handling the brush, structural composition of characters, philosophical significances, and even prototypical styles of a particular School of *Bei* [*Bei-xue* style] or of *Tie* [*Jin-Tang* style]. I will definitely not ponder over any of these calligraphic requirements and completely forget all of them.¹³²

It is easy to see that these words of his are just a transfer of his explanation of Emptiness in his discourse of “The tenor of Buddhism.” There he said,

Emptiness is based on breaking, destroying and totally removing the egocentric knowledge, which ordinary people cling to and abide by, and then based on devotion to all kinds of causes with the non-ego spirit.¹³³

His advocacy of “complete forgetting” in one’s artistic creation reflects his good knowledge of the three aspects of Emptiness underlined in *The Flower Garland Sutra*. According to him, at the moment of his creation, no thinking or discriminating process appeared in his mind. He liberated himself from clinging to and abiding by any calligraphic requirement. All the calligraphic forms he knew integrated with each other to turn out to be a brand new form. The last part of this letter indicates that this brand new form pertains to Buddhism. It is written as follows:

¹³² My translation. Ibid., p. 187.

¹³³ My translation. Hongyi, “Fofa shiyi lueshi [Explaining ten questions in Buddhism],” pp. 82-83.

Whether it is to write a calligraphic work or to carve a seal, both can reveal the author's temperament, which is naturally revealed but not intentionally expressed. What is revealed from my calligraphic work is a plain, tranquil and innocent flavor.¹³⁴

This passage could be easily associated with a Buddhist teaching of Ouyi's about the "light flavor," a concept from Buddhism. This teaching is included in *Hanjia ji* [*The collection of Master Ouyi's teachings*]. Hongyi compiled the book himself. There Ouyi wrote,

The secular world advocates a strong flavor, while Buddhism advocates a light flavor. To apprehend the light flavor, we should let go of all the strong mundane temperaments as much as we can, and to the extent that we have nothing to let go of, a light flavor will naturally be revealed.¹³⁵

As Hongyi wrote in his letter, the "plain, tranquil and innocent flavor" is naturally revealed through his "complete forgetting" of all conceivable calligraphic forms. It corresponds to what Ouyi regarded as the "light flavor," which is naturally revealed through letting-go-of all "mundane temperaments." From this perspective, what is revealed in Hongyi's calligraphic works is a Buddhist flavor. As the result of perfect mastery and complete forgetting of all "calligraphic requirements," his brand new

¹³⁴ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], p. 187.

¹³⁵ Hongyi, ed., *Han jia ji* [*The collection of Ouyi's teachings*] (Nantou: Taiwan deshan si, 1995), p. 9.

form could be seen as a calligraphic form without form.

In combination of his view of Emptiness and his Buddhist calligraphic ideas, the calligraphic form without form that he advocated and pursued can be summarized as follows:

A calligraphic form without form is a kind of calligraphy between likeness and unlikeness and is of all previous calligraphic forms including the calligrapher's personal styles at the same time. The calligrapher must forget all the calligraphic characteristics of the canonical types and styles in the history of Chinese calligraphy while he creates a calligraphic work in a brand new style, which has the five canonical types and styles and his personal styles integrated into each other seamlessly without showing any reference to them.

Part 2 *Jin-Tang* style and *Bei-xue* style

As the art of writing Chinese characters, Chinese Calligraphy is closely related to the Chinese characters in their formation and evolution, having as long a history as that of Chinese civilization. The calligraphic techniques basically have not changed since the Warring States period (476-221BC), because the materials used – paper, silk, brush, ink – have remained the same and for centuries, every calligrapher has to deal with exactly the same technical problems.¹³⁶ Typologically, there are five essential written forms: the seal script, the clerical script, the regular script, the fully cursive script, and the semi-cursive script. Each of them includes numerous subordinate styles, some of which are created by famous calligraphers, while others, by the natural evolution of the written language. In all these five types of script, the lexically identical characters differ in the number and position of their strokes.¹³⁷

The term of “seal script” is used for both great seal script and small seal script. The great seal script embraces oracle bone script, bronze vessel script and *Shi Gu* script.¹³⁸ The small seal script was formulated by Li Si (280-208BC), the Prime

¹³⁶ Ledderose, “Chinese Calligraphy,” p. 40.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ The oracle bone script is the earliest identifiable inscriptions on tortoise shells dating back to the *Shang* Dynasty (1600-1046BC). The bronze vessel script is the inscriptions on bronze ware which exist in parallel with oracle bone script for hundreds of years. *Shi Gu* script, also known as *Zhou* script, is the inscriptions on stone drums, dating back to the late Western *Zhou* Dynasty (1046-771BC). For the evolution of Chinese calligraphy and its types of script, see Chen Tingyou, *Chinese Calligraphy*, trans. Ren Lingjuan (Beijing: Wuzhou chubanshe, 2003), pp.

Minister of the *Qin* Dynasty (221-206BC), who unified and standardized different styles of great seal script prior to *Qin*. The clerical script is a simplified written form, dating back to the Warring States period (1600-1046BC). It came into being with the need for a writing system that could be easier and faster than the seal script. It found its final formulation in the Eastern *Han* Dynasty (25-220AD). It gave birth to the regular script and fully cursive script at the end of Eastern *Han*. The semi-cursive script is midway between regular and fully cursive scripts. It was the last written form to appear. The latter three types of script were finally formulated in the Eastern *Jin* Dynasty (317-420). No new types appeared thereafter.¹³⁹

From the late Eastern *Han* Dynasty when the literati began to explore the artistic dimension of their calligraphy, Chinese calligraphy turned into an art form.¹⁴⁰ This does not mean to ignore, weaken or deny the artistic values of the prior writings, which mainly served the practical purpose of conveying human thoughts. As Xiong Bingming, a contemporary artist and philosopher (1922-), wrote in *The theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*, Chinese calligraphy experienced two periods of its development: the period before and during the *Tang* Dynasty and the period after *Tang*. In the first period, the calligraphers were exploring and establishing the rules of calligraphy, and the calligraphers after *Tang* began to study these rules, but later they tried to escape from them and even violated them.¹⁴¹ Historically, Chinese

13-31.

¹³⁹ Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy," p. 40.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴¹ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*],

calligraphy has been developing periodically and linearly and the calligraphy of each period took on its particular forms and styles.

There are as many calligraphic styles as there are calligraphers. Whether it is the seal script, clerical script or any other types of script, it can be written in many ways, given that the established rules are followed. Lothar Ledderose, a well-known sinologist of Chinese calligraphy, concisely summed up the features of a traditional calligrapher as follows:

A proficient calligrapher did not only have to master several types of script, he was also expected to write in the styles of several old masters. He might even integrate several old styles into one particular piece of calligraphy as different stylistic levels or aesthetic allusions, demonstrating in his performance that he knew the history of calligraphy both in theory and in practice. It was nevertheless expected of a master that he ultimately develop an individual style.¹⁴²

Every traditional calligrapher starts with studying basic techniques and imitating classical masterworks. A master of calligraphy must have developed an individualized style. His calligraphy must be rooted in any type of script, must be based on the artistic tradition of calligraphy, and must meet the requirements of two mainstream writing systems: *Jin-Tang* style and *Bei-xue* style.

Wang Xizhi (303-361) is credited with standardizing the regular script and

p. 34.

¹⁴² Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy," p. 41.

bringing the cursive script to perfection. He is regarded as “the sage of Chinese calligraphy.” He and his peers were dedicated to developing aesthetic potentials of Chinese characters. Their handwritings peaked in the first period of the historical development of Chinese calligraphy. The calligraphers of *Tang* Dynasty completely inherited the *Jin* dynasty-style and established more rigorous rules to consolidate its tradition.¹⁴³ Given their continuity, the two dynasty-styles are collectively called the *Jin-Tang* style. Many calligraphic works of these two periods are canonized as the classical models of Chinese calligraphy. In his paper, Ledderose described such a phenomenon of calligraphy as follows:

The stability in the types of script during the last fifteen hundred years is corroborated by an impressive stability of aesthetic and stylistic standards, which were embodied in a canon of classical masterworks. It first comprised the handwritings of Wang Xizhi and his peers, but works of later masters were added as time went on. These canonical works served as the basis for a complex stylistic edifice that was built up over the centuries, as a great number of personal, school and period styles evolved.¹⁴⁴

The *Jin-Tang* style was strongly advocated by emperors and institutions of higher learning from the *Song* Dynasty onwards. Its dominance in the realm of Chinese calligraphy was not challenged until the rise of the *Bei-xue* movement. This

¹⁴³ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*], p. 34.

¹⁴⁴ Ledderose, “Chinese Calligraphy,” p. 40.

movement was a great reform in the history of calligraphy.¹⁴⁵ It emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century when the archaeological and epigraphic studies became popular among the literati. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), a well-known scholar and leader of Chinese constitutional reform and modernization, led the *Bei-xue* movement to its culmination. He attempted to modernize Chinese calligraphy and recommended studying the inscriptions on tombstones from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-557), especially those from the Northern *Wei* Dynasty (386-534).¹⁴⁶ Most of these stone inscriptions were written in the “tablet-script,” also known as “*Wei* tablet-script,” which is based on the clerical script and belongs to the regular script genre.¹⁴⁷ Because many of them were written and carved by less-educated artisans and rural people using “crude patterns and erroneous strokes,”¹⁴⁸ they were ignored and underestimated for a long time before the rise of the *Bei-xue* movement by the elite calligraphers.¹⁴⁹ In addition to the “*Wei* tablet-script,” *Bei-xue* advocates also paid great attention to the seal script on bronze ware, tortoise shells, the clerical script from ancient tablets, and even some nameless types of script. Generally, *Bei-xue* style refers to the writing system based

¹⁴⁵ Jin Mei gave a detailed introduction of the *Bei-xue* movement when writing about Hongyi’s calligraphy. See Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], pp. 626-28, 631-32.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 617, 631.

¹⁴⁷ Chen Tingyou, *Chinese Calligraphy*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*], pp. 184-87.

on “*Wei* tablet-script” and archaic types of script. *Bei-xue* advocates embraced all kinds of types and styles written by either the elite or common people, integrated into each other and complementing each other. Take Kang Youwei for example. He combined the “stone script with the *Tang* and *Song* styles made by Ouyang Xun, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian,” and developed his own “Kang style.”¹⁵⁰ Although Kang and his peers failed to achieve the same success as *Jin* and *Tang* calligraphers do, their bold and creative attempts to integrate all kinds of types and styles into each other succeeded in appealing to the calligraphers and amateur calligraphers with different educational backgrounds.

¹⁵⁰ Chen Tingyou, *Chinese Calligraphy*, p. 108. Ouyang Xun (557-641), one of the greatest calligraphers of the *Tang* Dynasty, best known for his regular style. Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), one of the greatest calligraphers of the *Song* Dynasty, best known for his cursive style. Both Su Shi and Huang Tingjian inherited and further developed the artistic tradition based on the *Jin-Tang* style.

Part 3 Master Hongyi's three personal styles

Hongyi's early life coincided with the period of the late *Qing* Dynasty (1644-1911) when the *Bei-xue* movement became dominant in the literati's life. He received a traditional elite education. From 1888 to 1898, he learnt traditional Chinese and calligraphy successively under the mentorship of Chang Yunzhuang, Tang Jingyan and Zhao Youmei (1868-1939), three well-known scholars who were also *Bei-xue* calligraphers and epigraphists at the time.¹⁵¹ During this period he systematically studied the large and small seal scripts, the seal cutting, the clerical script, as well as the regular script of Northern *Wei* ("Wei tablet-script). He imitated a great number of copies of stone inscriptions, such as *Xuan wang lie bei* (Fig. 2.1)¹⁵² in the *Shi Gu* script, *Yi shan bei* (Fig. 2.2) by Li Si, *Tian fa shen chen bei* (Fig. 2.3) in the script between the seal script and the clerical script of the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280), *Cao quan bei* (Fig. 2.4) in the clerical script of Eastern *Han* Dynasty,

¹⁵¹ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], pp. 625-26.

¹⁵² Most stone inscriptions of ancient times in the *Bei-xue* style did not contain the authors' names. They were commonly named after their locations, purposes or key words of their content. I will simply present their names in the form of *Pinyin* [Romanized Chinese] without translating them into English and indicating their specific time of writing. Whereas, many calligraphic works of the *Jin-Tang* style were written by well-known calligraphers, and some of them contained titles. I will present their names with my translation of them in order to distinguish them from the stone inscriptions.

Zhang Menglong bei (Fig. 2.5 and Fig. 2.6) and *Longmen si pin* (Fig. 2.7) in the “*Wei* tablet-script.” He also worked hard at *Jin-Tang* styled masterworks, such as *Shiqi tie* [*Seventeen manuscripts*] (Fig. 2.8) in the fully cursive script by Wang Xizhi, *Songfeng ge shi* [*Poem written in Pavilion of “Pines and Wind”*] (Fig. 2.9) in the semi-cursive script by Huang Tingjian.¹⁵³

According to his biography written by Ke Wenhui, he learnt Kang Youwei’s *Shu jing* [*Calligraphic mirror*], a well-known treatise on calligraphy, at the age of nineteen and became enthusiastic about the *Bei-xue* movement. The family wealth and influence allowed him to read and study many precious copies and meet many renowned scholars and calligraphers of the time.¹⁵⁴ He was habituated to reading and studying ancient calligraphic works even in his monastic life. In his forties, he rededicated himself to *Zhang Menglong bei*.¹⁵⁵ It is agreed that he made meticulous imitations and mastered almost all types of script, which helped him to lay a solid foundation for the creation of his own personal styles. Some of his imitation works

¹⁵³ His imitations mentioned above are collected in Xia Mianzun, ed., *Li xi weng ling gu fashu* [*Li Shutong imitating ancient calligraphic masterworks*] (Shanghai: Shanghai kaiming shudian, 1929).

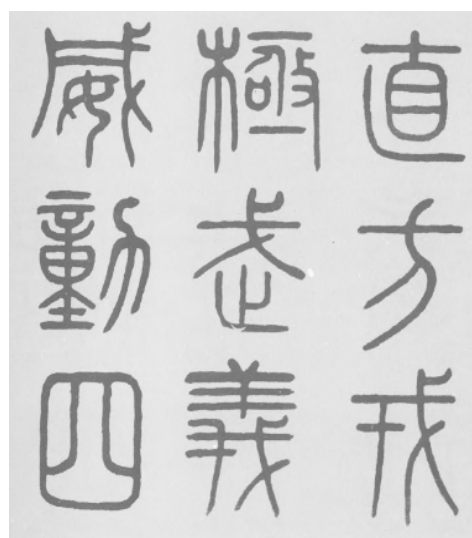
¹⁵⁴ Ke Wenhui, “Lingji neilian, qingfeng wailiu [The flow of wisdom like the breeze],” *Ershi shiji shufa jingdian, Lishutong juan* [*Calligraphic masterworks of the twentieth century, Volume of Li Shutong*], eds. Ke Wenhui and Liu Xueyang (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 12-13.

¹⁵⁵ Lin Yuanbai. “Mantan Hongyi fashi shufa [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi’s calligraphy],” *Xiandai foxue* [*Modern Buddhism study*], No. 6 (1962), n. pag, *Goodweb.cn*, Web (Accessed on May 10 2013).

will be displayed below and juxtaposed with the original copies to show his solid basic skills, which are essential to a traditional master of calligraphy.¹⁵⁶

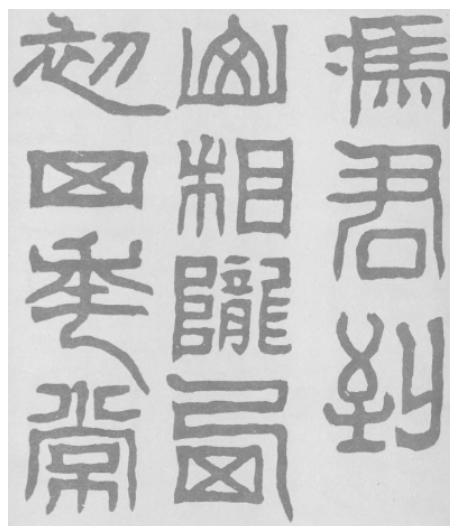


2.1

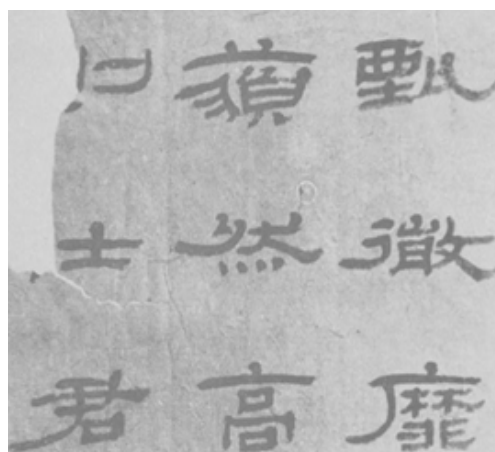


2.2

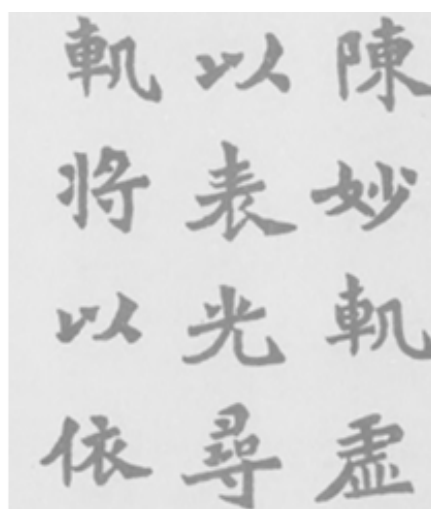
¹⁵⁶ The pictures of Hongyi's imitation works under discussion are selected from *Hongyi dashi quanji di jiu juan* [*The complete works of Master Hongyi*, Vol. 9], ed. Hongyi dashi quanji bianweihui (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1991).



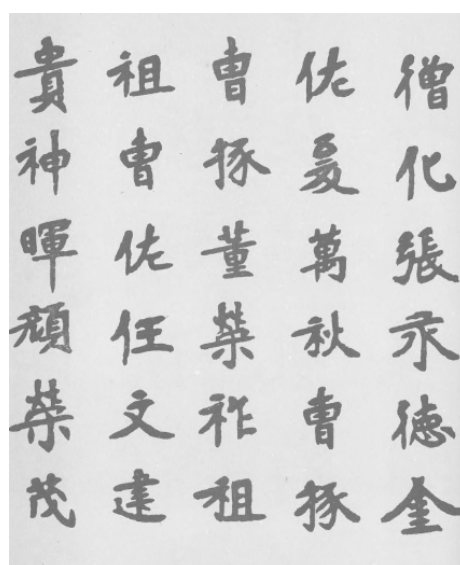
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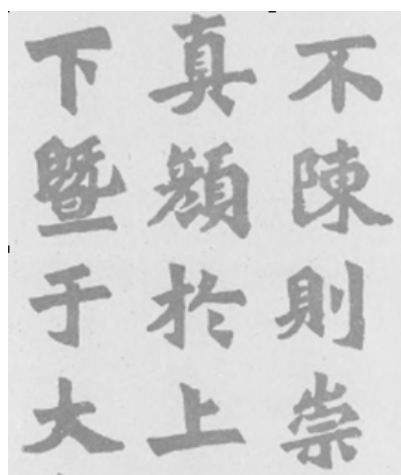
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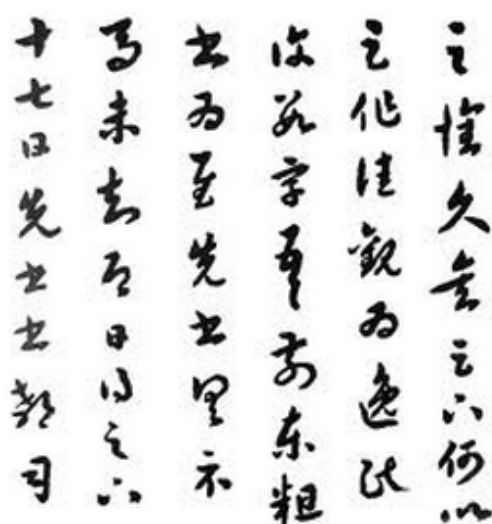
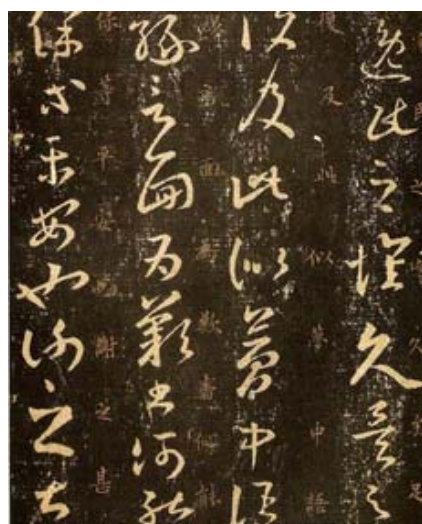
2.5



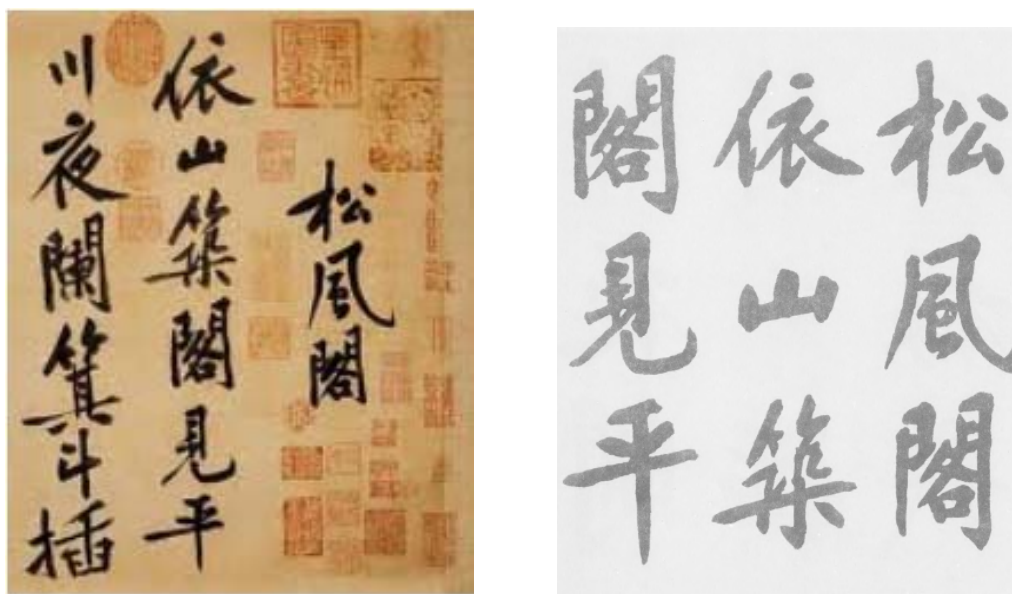
2.6



2.7



2.8



2.9

Fig. 2.1 Stone inscription of *Xuan wang lie bei* in large seal script and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.2 Stone inscription of *Yi shan bei* in small seal script and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.3 Stone inscription of *Tian fa shen chen bei* between seal and clerical scripts and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.4 Stone inscription of *Cao quan bei* in clerical script and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.5 Stone inscription of *Zhang Monglong bei—bei yang* in “Wei tablet-script” and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.6 Stone inscription of *Zhang Menglong bei—bei yin* in “Wei tablet-script” and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.7 Stone inscription of *Long men si pin* in “Wei tablet-script” and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.8 Manuscript of Wang Xizhi, *Shiqi tie* [Seventeen manuscripts] and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Fig. 2.9 Manuscript of Huang Tingjian, *Songfeng ge shi* [Poem written in Pavilion of “Pines and wind”] and Hongyi's imitation of it.

Hongyi was familiar with calligraphic theories of different eras and had a theoretical comprehension of the evolution of Chinese calligraphy. When he was an art teacher in Zhejiang First Normal school from 1913 to 1915, he wrote a brief history of calligraphy, in which he introduced essential types of script, mainstream school-styles and dynasty-styles, and famous calligraphers by means of substantial document materials.¹⁵⁷ He valued most the seal script and often spoke of his systematic study of the seal script in his later years.¹⁵⁸ He wrote that:

To those who are keen to practice their writing, I always recommend that they begin with the seal script. What is the reason? It is because every Chinese character has its own source and represents a specific meaning. Every stroke of a character must not be carelessly written. If we do not study the seal script or *Explaining and analyzing characters* [*Shuo wen jie zi*, an ancient dictionary written in the small seal script], we cannot understand calligraphy and the origins of Chinese characters – that is simply illiterate! Note that it is a shame to write wrong characters. Furthermore, the seal script provides the basis for practicing the clerical, regular and semi-cursive scripts. It will be easy to master these scripts if we master the seal script, because the seal script is essential to any kind of writing. . . . The seal script, clerical script and even semi-cursive script, all

¹⁵⁷ Xingchi, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], pp. 120-200.

¹⁵⁸ Pan Liangzhen, “Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi’s calligraphy],” p. 15.

the types of script must be learnt and mastered. What's more, we should study all the copies of stone inscriptions and manuscripts, at least, browse through these copies.¹⁵⁹

He pointed out the basic role of the seal script and advocated the thorough knowledge of all types and styles. His idea and its expression are consistent with Kang Youwei's teaching in his *Calligraphic mirror* as follows:

If one can read and imitate one thousand copies of stone inscriptions [in the “*Wei* tablet-script”], it will be impossible not to become a proficient calligrapher. . . . If one studies the seal script and *Fen* script [a script between seal script and clerical script], he will know the origins of Chinese characters. If he studies the clerical script of *Han*, he will know how to represent massiveness [an aesthetic quality of calligraphy]. If he studies the semi-cursive and fully cursive scripts, he will know how to diversify his personal style. If he studies all kinds of copies of stone inscriptions, he will know the rules in calligraphy. If he studies the decorative patterns carved on the *Han* eave tiles and *Jin* stone bricks, he will know how to make a novel and original work. If he is devoted to practicing these types and styles for so long a time, his calligraphy will be consecrated.¹⁶⁰

In addition to Kang's calligraphic theory, Hongyi also inherited and further developed

¹⁵⁹ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], pp. 165-66.

¹⁶⁰ My translation. Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*], pp. 145-47.

the theory of Bao Shichen (1775-1855), another representative figure in the *Bei-xue* movement. Bao advocated using the geometric concepts such as coordinates and areas and the painter's way of seeing to improve the composition of a calligraphic work.¹⁶¹ Hongyi applied Western painting principles to the composition of his calligraphy. This is his most significant reform of Chinese calligraphy.

The evolution of his personal style went through three phases: the period of *Bei-xue* style, the period of *Jin-Tang* style or early "Hongyi-style," and the period of late "Hongyi-style."¹⁶² Most of his works in his secular days were manifestly written in the "*Wei* tablet-script" combining features of the clerical and regular scripts.¹⁶³ It is obvious that *Zhang Menglong bei* (Fig. 2.5 and Fig. 2.6) and *Long men si pin* (Fig. 2.7) have influenced prototypically his calligraphic works of this period, as shown in the figures below.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁶² Pan Liangzhen, "Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi's calligraphy]," pp. 16-17.

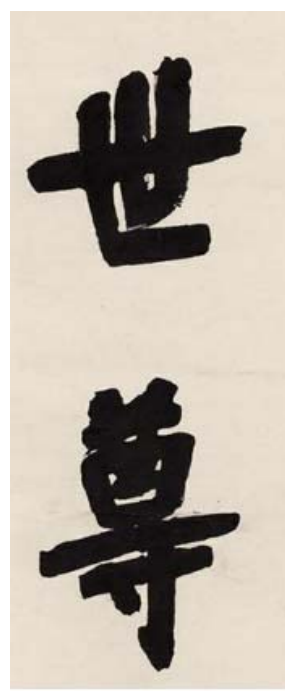
¹⁶³ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 629.



2.10



2.11



2.12

Fig. 2.10 Hongyi's manuscript emulating the "Wei tablet-script" of *Zhang menglong bei—beiyin*.

Dated 1912.

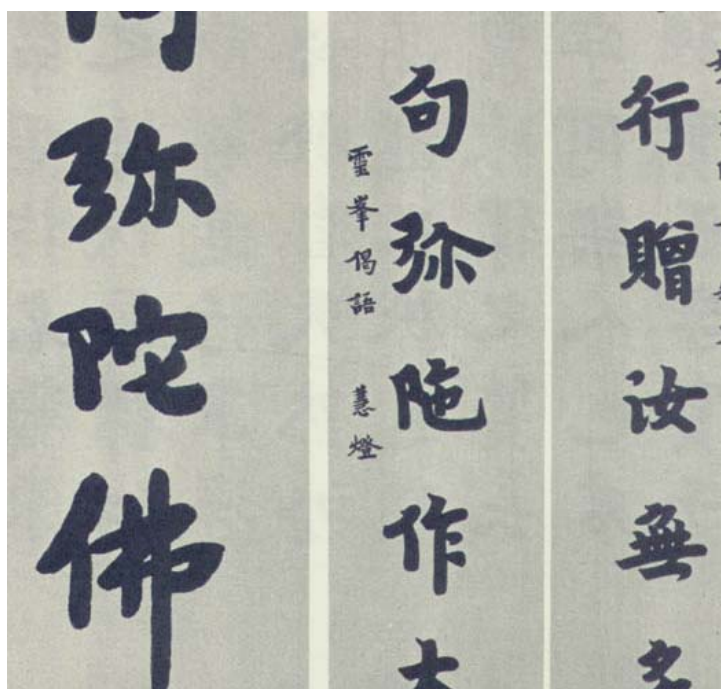
Fig. 2.11 Hongyi's manuscript emulating the "Wei tablet-script" of *Longmen sipin*. Dated 1915.

Fig. 2.12 Hongyi's manuscript emulating the "Wei tablet-script" of *Zhang menglong bei—bei yang*.

Dated 1917.

After he converted to Buddhism, he attempted to create a calligraphic style in accordance with his Buddhist faith. As Pan Liangzhen noted, he started with reducing angularity and increasing curvature of the *Bei-xue* style to make the strokes look smooth and flowing.¹⁶⁴ Fig. 2.13 shows his achievement of this period.

¹⁶⁴ Pan Liangzhen, "Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi's calligraphy]," p. 12.



2.13

Fig. 2.13 Hongyi's manuscripts showing a change in his personal style. Dated 1919.

Yinguang's instruction to him in 1923 brought a fundamental change to his personal style. It is as follows:

The practice of copying sutras differs from calligraphic creation, in which we concentrate more on expressing emotions and with no need to write neatly and orderly. It is better to copy sutras in the way the officials take to write memorials, that is, every stroke should be written meticulously with sincerity. The regular script should be used. It is absolutely forbidden to copy sutras in the cursive way you often took to write personal letters. . . . Nowadays people copy sutras carelessly and at discretion. Rather than copy sutras, they just practice their handwritings and leave their copies to their later generations. . . . Their irreverent and

inattentive attitudes are a shame.¹⁶⁵

Following Yinguang's instruction, Hongyi turned to study and emulate *Jin-Tang* styled masterworks written in the regular script. The regular script requires that every stroke be distinctly and carefully written, and that every character be a self-contained and well balanced unit. He received Yinguang's recognition for his modified style, and Yinguang wrote back to reaffirm the importance of sincerity and reverence in copying sutras in order to "sublimate the human's thinking into the Buddha's wisdom."¹⁶⁶ In a letter to his friend Du Shenfu, Hongyi spoke of his stylistic change as follows:

My recent script can match *Jin-Tang* and is on a par with it finally.

But it no longer belongs to the *Bei-xue* system. Ma Yifu was satisfied with my recent works.¹⁶⁷

Hua yan ji lian san bai [*Three hundred couplets adapted from "The Flower Garland Sutra"*] (Fig. 2.14) is his representative work of this period. Ma Yifu classified it into the realm of *Yi pin* [works with carefree and leisurable features], as he said, :

In his later years, Hongyi insulated himself from the secular world.

His calligraphy was cleansed of angularity and massiveness, and reached a tranquil spiritual level. This work is representative of *Yi pin*.¹⁶⁸

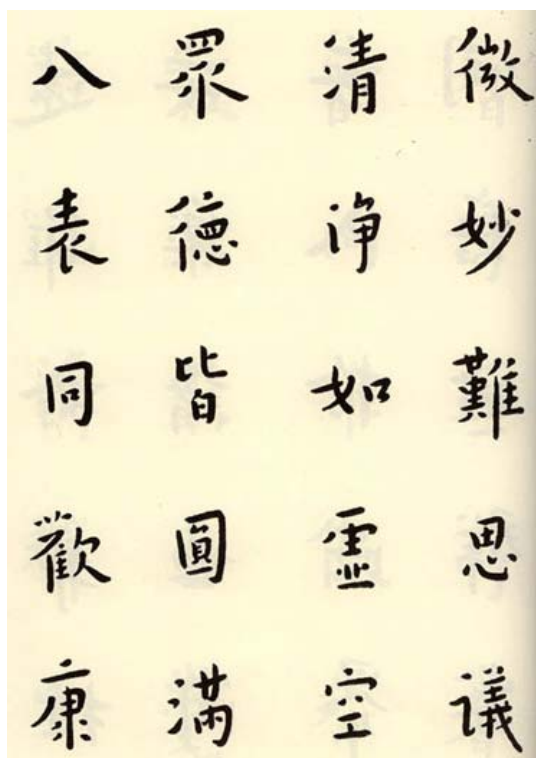
¹⁶⁵ My translation. Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], pp. 291-92.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 631.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 633; Xingchi, *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], p. 244; Zhang

According to Xiong Bingming's theory, *Yi pin* refers to the calligraphic works of *Jin-Tang* style. It was first used to describe the masterworks of Wang Xizhi and his peers.¹⁶⁹ Ma Yifu's comment was approved by many modern and contemporary scholars and frequently quoted in their books and articles about Hongyi's calligraphy.



2.14

Fig. 2.14 Hongyi's chef-d'oeuvre of his early "Hongyi-style," *Huanyan jilian sanbai* [Three hundred couplets adapted from "The Flower Garland Sutra"]. Dated 1929.

Hongyi's calligraphy was not confined to the *Jin-Tang* style and he took more than ten years to improve his own style by searching for the balance and harmony between *Jin-Tang* style and *Bei-xue* style, and created the late "Hongyi-style" in his

Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art], p. 305.

¹⁶⁹ For *Yi pin*, see Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy], pp. 157-63.

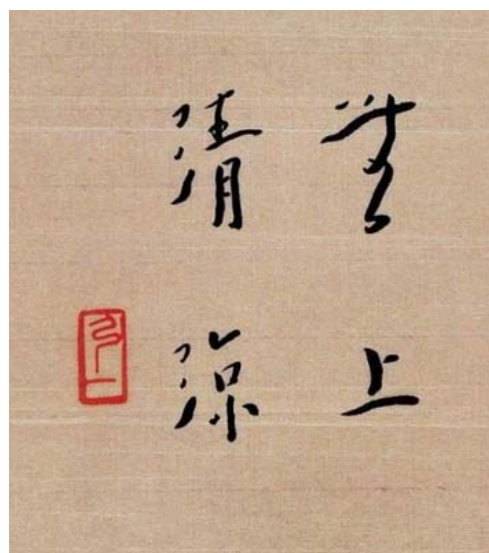
sixties. The *Jin-Tang* style is based on Wang Xizhi's cursive style, which finds its full expression in his best-known work *Lanting xu* [*Preface written in Pavilion of "Orchids"*] (Fig. 2.15). Ledderose concisely described the features of this work as follows:

The quality of this slightly cursive script lies in its masterly combination of firm precision with graceful ease. The constant variations in the shape of the strokes, the free yet balanced composition, the easy flow in the lines as well as the lively spacing in the entire composition work together to produce an artistic rhythm that set a standard for centuries to come.¹⁷⁰

Such a description can also be applied to the late "Hongyi-style," as shown in Fig. 2.16, a work of his dating from 1942.



2.15

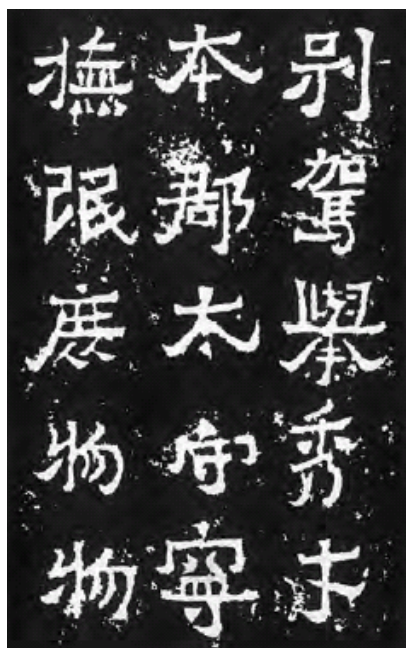


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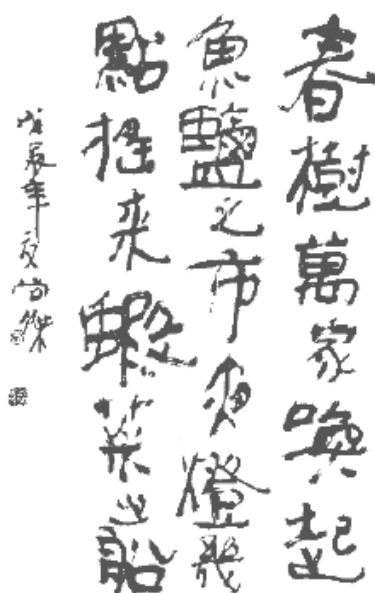
Fig. 2.15 Wang Xizhi's manuscript of *Lanting xu* in his cursive style. Dated 353.

¹⁷⁰ Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy," p. 38.

Fig. 2.16 Hongyi's manuscript of his late "Hongyi-style." Dated 1942.



2.17



2.18

Fig. 2.17 Stone inscription of *Cuan bao zi bei* in the "tablet script."

Fig. 2.18 Wu Shangjie's manuscript emulating the "tablet script" of *Cuan bao zi bei* (Fig. 2.17).

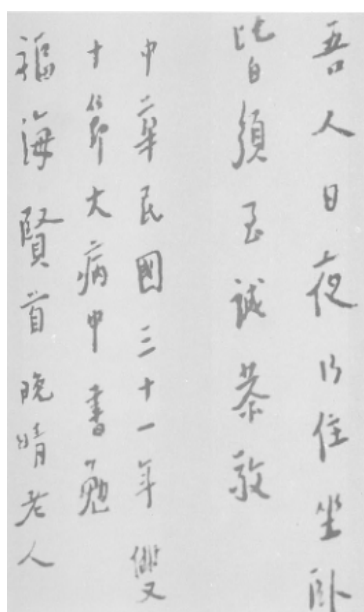
The feature of the *Bei-xue* style advocated by Kang Youwei lies in the unity of different types and styles. An example can be seen in Fig. 2.18, a calligraphic work by Wu Shangjie, a modern calligrapher. Obviously, he emulated the "tablet-script" of *Cuan bao zi bei* (Fig. 2.17) while integrating some features of the cursive script into it.

Chen Tingyou commented this work as follows:

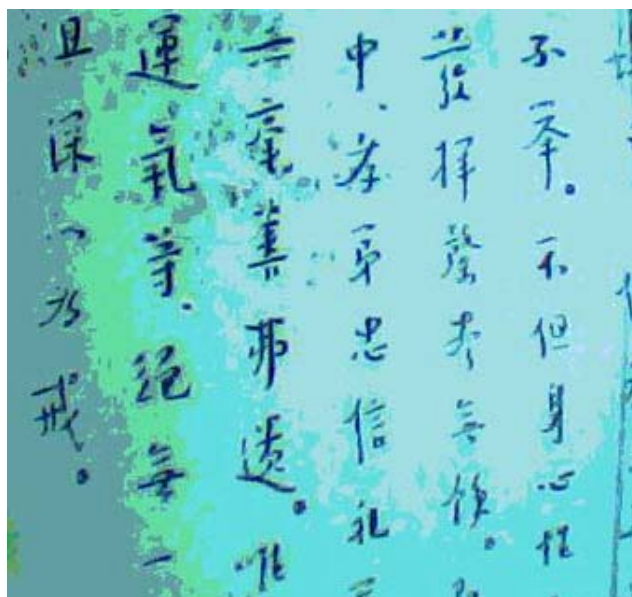
[This work] does not demonstrate the gracefulness of the stone carving of the southern tablet [*Cuan bao zi bei*] but is as simple, precipitous and clumsy as that of 1,500 years age. He has added the features of the cursive script to it, to produce a charming effect.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Chen Tingyou, *Chinese Calligraphy*, pp. 111-12.

As for the late “Hongyi-style” (see Fig. 2.16), it integrates the features of five canonical types of script into it. Concretely, it borrows the slender figure from the small seal script and some compositional structures from the semi and fully cursive scripts. Though some strokes seem to be rounded or joined together, every stroke has been distinctly drawn with two discernible ends, which conform to the writing principles of the regular script. The strokes take on undulating or up-and-down shapes, and the integral parts of a character, such as its left and right downward strokes, its longest horizontal stroke, are drawn with elaborate and pronounced ends. These handlings pertain to the clerical script. Although the late “Hongyi-style” went through some changes and adjustments during Hongyi’s last few years, the aforementioned features were maintained and consolidated as the visual idiosyncrasies unique to him.



2.19



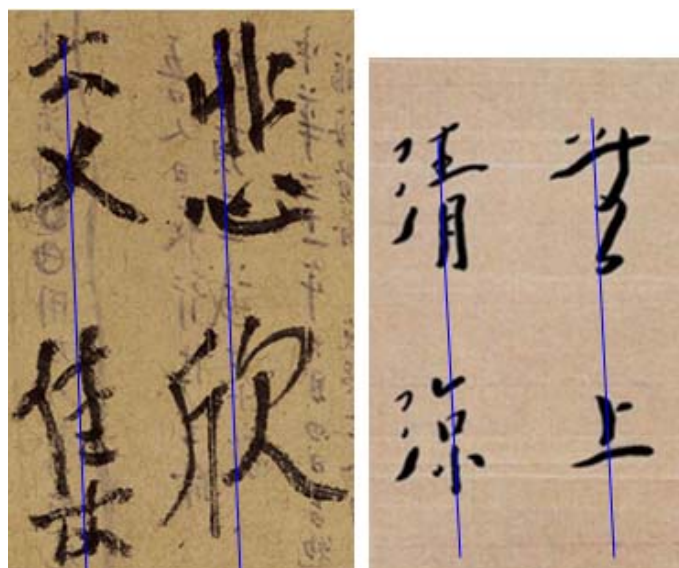
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Fig. 2.19 Hongyi’s inscription for Huang Fuhai (Fig. 1.2) written in his late “Hongyi-style.”

Fig. 2.20 Another manuscript of Hongyi’s of his late “Hongyi-style.” Dated 1942.

Part 4 Hongyi's *Bei xin jiao ji* with a form without form

The late “Hongyi-style” was used most frequently in his last few years. In the morning of the same day when he wrote his last work, he also wrote two other pieces of calligraphic work for Huang Fuhai in this style, as seen in Fig. 2.19 and Fig. 2.20.¹⁷² However, his last work was written in a totally different style which had been never seen in his previous works. This brand new style includes four subordinate parts shown in four subdivisions: four characters of large size in the middle, three characters of medium size to the left side, ten characters of small size along the right edge, and six characters of small size in the lower right corner. Each subordinate part unifies one of his personal styles and several prominent old styles in the history of calligraphy.



2.21

¹⁷² Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 670.

Fig. 2.21 Comparison between the style of *Bei xin jiao ji* and the late “Hongyi-style.”

Hongyi’s script of “悲欣交集” embraces some visual idiosyncrasies of the late “Hongyi-style.” Each character is a self-contained, well balanced unit and takes on a slender figure favoring its left side, as illustrated by Fig. 2.21. Its vertical strokes are pronounced and elongated, while its horizontal strokes are shortened or taken place of by a grouping of dots written in the cursive style. Overall, the strokes are distinctly drawn and exhibit a sense of spontaneity through their varying thickness and abbreviations, and the connections between strokes seem to originate naturally. Each character carries some strokes showing typical features of the clerical script. Furthermore, Hongyi’s script is reminiscent of some classic manuscripts and stone inscriptions of ancient times, which are juxtaposed with each other to show their similarities.



2.22



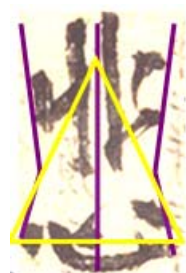
2.23



2.24



2.25



2.26

Fig. 2.22 Hongyi's script of “悲.”

Fig. 2.23 and Fig. 2.24 Wang Xizhi's script of “悲” in his cursive style.

Fig. 2.25 Character of “悲” in small seal script.

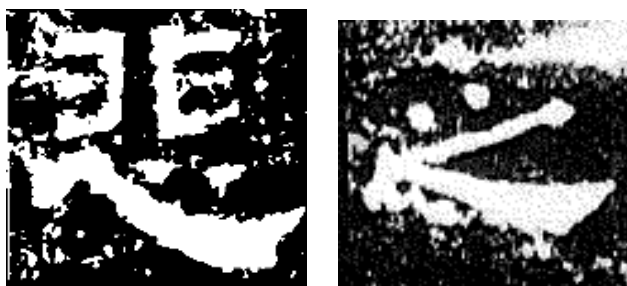
Fig. 2.26 Comparison between Hongyi's script of “悲” and the small seal script.

Take Hongyi's script of “悲” (Fig. 2.22) for example. In terms of the structure, his grouping and spacing of strokes in the upper part of “悲” reminds of Wang Xizhi's classic handling of it in the cursive script, as shown in Fig. 2.23 and Fig. 2.24. The horizontal strokes are simplified into vertical dots that are drawn close to the central verticals and cursively connected to them. In this way, the figure of “悲” is horizontally tightened, vertically stretched, and imbued with ease and fluency. Adequate space is set aside between the upper and lower parts of “悲” to ensure the character a slender figure representative of the small seal script, as shown in Fig. 2.25. The central verticals that appear to be parallel and equal in length, as well as an implied pyramid structure, as illustrated by Fig. 2.26, bring to the overall structure of “悲” a sense of balance.



2.27

Fig. 2.27 Comparison between *Zhang Menglong bei—bei yang* and Hongyi's script of “悲.”



2.28

Fig. 2.28 Characters written in the clerical script of *Han* Dynasty.

In terms of the stroke shapes, the prototypes of each stroke in Hongyi's script can be found in the inscription of *Zhangmenglong bei—bei yang* (Fig. 2.27).¹⁷³ Kang Youwei highly praised *Zhang Menglong bei* in his *Calligraphic mirror* as follows:

Zhang Menglong bei encompasses all the potential variations in the

¹⁷³ The stone tablet of *Zhang Menglong bei* bears two inscriptions *Zhang menglong bei—bei yin* and *Zhang Menglong bei—bei yang*. The former was carved on its front, and the latter, its back. Both of them belong to the “*Wei* tablet script,” but were written in two different styles.

character patterns and stroke shapes. It brought the regular script to its perfection.¹⁷⁴

Zhang Menglong bei was Hongyi's favorite stone inscription. He collected many copies of stone inscriptions and classic manuscripts in his secular days. After he converted to Buddhism, he only kept the copy of *Zhang Menglong bei* with him and presented the others to his friends and students.¹⁷⁵ It is not surprising that *Zhang Menglong bei* has its prototypical significance for his last work. In his script, the reclining stroke of “悲” takes on a fleshy, curved shape, which is typical of the clerical script of Eastern *Han* Dynasty, as shown in Fig. 42.



2.29



2.30



2.31



2.32

Fig. 2.29 Hongyi's script of “欣.”

Fig. 2.30 Wang Xizhi's script of “欣” in his cursive style.

Fig. 2.31 Wang Xianzhi's script of “欣” in his cursive style.

Fig. 2.32 Character of “欣” written in small seal script.

Then, Hongyi's “欣” (Fig. 2.29) is to be analyzed. In terms of the structure, his

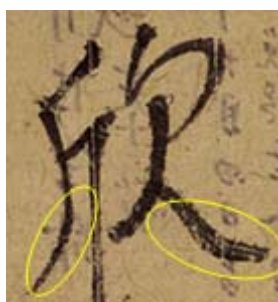
¹⁷⁴ My translation. Yang Sufang and Hou Dongsheng, eds., *Zhongguo shufa jingdian* [Classical theories of Chinese calligraphy] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe), p. 599.

¹⁷⁵ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi], p. 627.

script reminds of two classical models of *Jin* cursive style, one from Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu* (Fig. 2.30), and the other by Wang Xianzhi (344-386, Wang Xizhi's second son; Fig. 2.31). The vertical strokes are elongated to ensure the character a slender figure that appears to be tight in its upper part and loose in its lower part, which is characteristic of *Yi shan bei* (Fig. 2.32), Li Si's chef-d'oeuvre in the small seal script. Hongyi used similar words to summarize the typical features of this work.¹⁷⁶ His handling of the downward strokes, as marked in Fig. 2.33, corresponds to what Kang Youwei named "*Shun tuo fa* [the method of dragging the brush]," which is used to represent the finishing end of a downward stroke. The brush is required to be slowly dragged and slightly lifted at the same time, and after making an elongated shape, it will be lifted in a sudden movement to form a pointed tip or an angular edge. This technique is typical of the "*Wei* tablet-script" and significantly embodied in *Shi men ming* (Fig. 2.34), a famous stone inscription dating from 509. Kang Youwei appreciated it so much and applied it to his "Kang-style" (Fig. 2.35).¹⁷⁷ Probably inspired by Kang's calligraphy, Hongyi used this technique a lot in his early works of *Bei-xue* style, as exemplified by Fig. 2.36, a work written in 1918.

¹⁷⁶ Xingchi, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], p. 127.

¹⁷⁷ Zhou Ruchang, *Yong zi ba fa: shufa yishu jiangyi* [*Eight principles exemplified in the character of "永": Materials for teaching Chinese calligraphy*] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), p. 9.



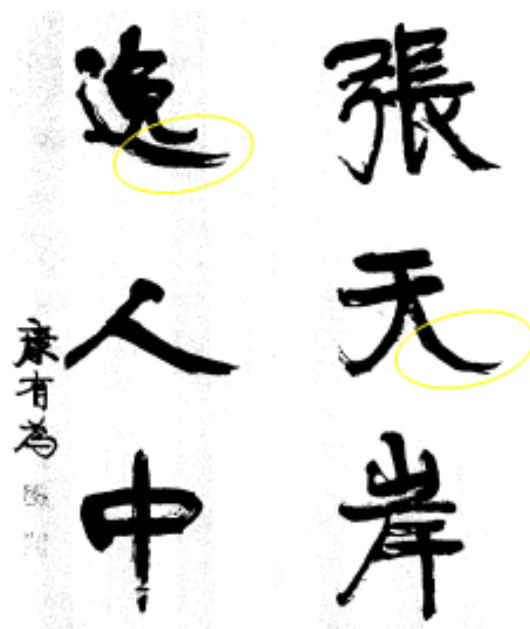
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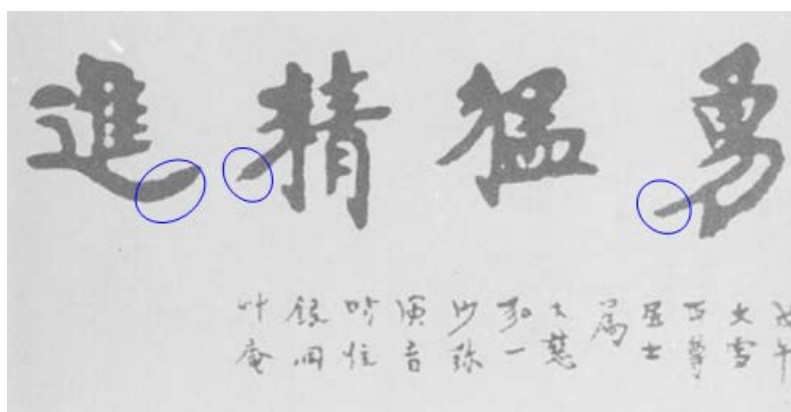
2.34

Fig. 2.33 Hongyi's treatment of the downward strokes of “欣.”

Fig. 2.34 Stone inscription of *Shi men ming* in “Wei tablet-script.”



2.35



2.36

Fig. 2.35 Kang Youwei's manuscript of *Bei-xue* style.

Fig. 2.36 Hongyi's manuscript of "Wei tablet-script." Dated 1918.

The *Jin-Tang* style predominates in Hongyi's script of "見觀經" (Fig. 2.37). Their slender figures and compact structures are reminiscent of *Songfeng ge shi*, Huang Tingjian's chef-d'oeuvre dating from 1102 (Fig. 2.38). Huang Tingjian was one of the greatest calligraphers of *Song* Dynasty and also a devoted practitioner of Wang Xizhi's cursive style. The structure of Hongyi's "見" corresponds to that of Huang's classic version. The overall shaping of Hongyi's "觀" seems like a simplified and compact version of "觀" from Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu* (Fig. 2.39). The main vertical in the left part of "觀," as marked in Fig. 2.37, is slightly curved to the left. This handling is typical of Liu Gongquan's regular style, as illustrated by Fig. 2.40.

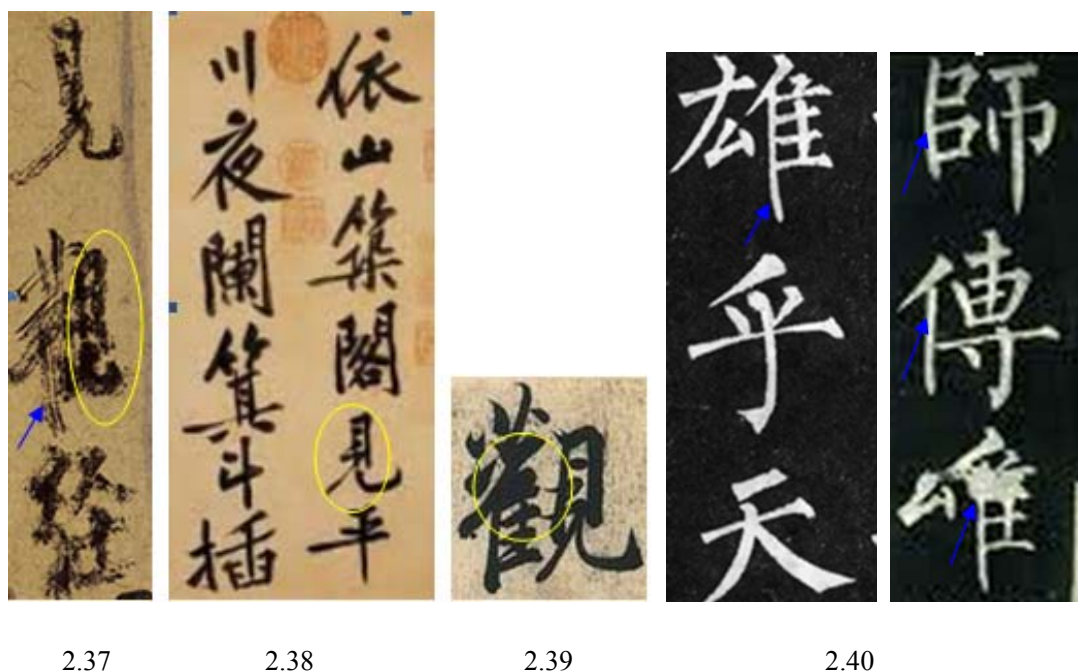


Fig. 2.37 Hongyi's script of "見觀經."

Fig. 2.38 Huang Tingjian's manuscript of *Songfeng ge shi* and his script of "見" in *Jin-Tang* style.

Fig. 2.39 Wang Xizhi's script of "觀" in his cursive style.

Fig. 2.40 Liu Gongquan's handling of the vertical stroke in his regular style.

The ten characters along the right edge (Fig. 2.41) are represented in a way that emulates the *Wei-Jin* regular style, which was developed by Zhong You (151-230) of *Wei* Kingdom and Wang Xizhi of *Jin* Dynasty. Zhong You's regular style (Fig. 2.44) retains certain features particular to the clerical script, for example, the flat figure of the character, the nearly equal thickness of strokes, and the less varied stroke shapes.¹⁷⁸ Wang Xizhi's regular style (Fig. 2.45) is based on that of Zhong You. It retains the flat figure of the character while adding variations to the shape and width of the strokes.¹⁷⁹ Their regular styles are taken together as the *Wei-Jin* regular style. Traditionally, it is used to write small sized characters. Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) and Wang Chong (1494-1533) of *Ming* Dynasty (1368-1644) are excellent masters of this regular style in the post-Zhong-Wang times. According to Pan Liangzhen, Hongyi imitated Wen Zhengming's copy of *The Heart Sutra* at his age of twelve. It was his first contact with the *Wei-Jin* regular style. From then on, he unceasingly studied manuscripts of *Wei-Jin* regular style, especially the masterworks of Zhong You and Wang Xizhi.¹⁸⁰

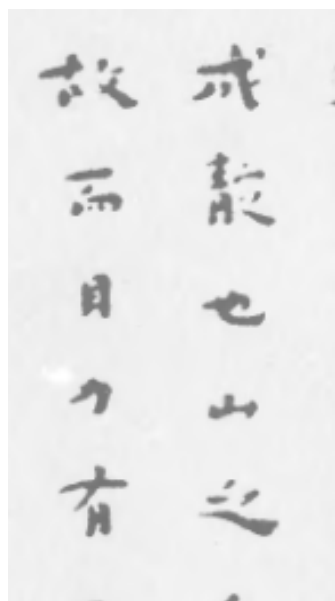
¹⁷⁸ Xingchi, ed., *Li Shutong tan yi* [*Li Shutong teaches the art*], p. 150. .

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁸⁰ Pan Liangzhen, "Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi's calligraphy]," p. 14.



2.41



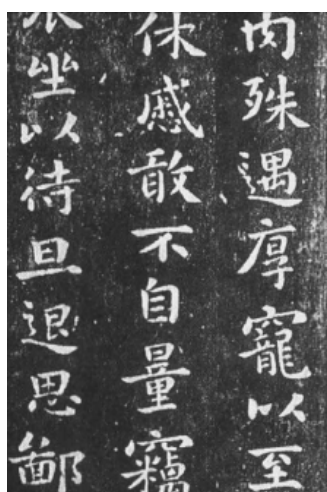
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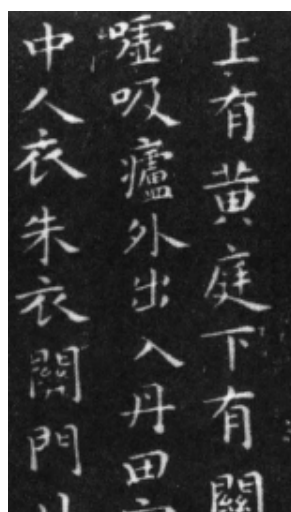
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Fig. 2.41 Hongyi's script of the inscription of his last calligraphic work..

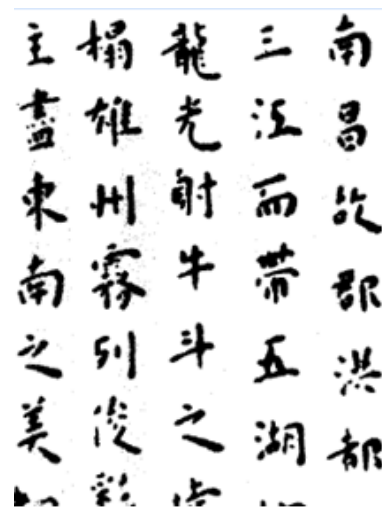
Fig. 2.42 and Fig. 2.43 Hongyi's manuscripts of *Wei-Jin* regular style.



2.44



2.45



2.46

Fig. 2.44 Zhong You's regular style.

Fig. 2.45 Wang Xizhi's regular style.

Fig. 2.46 Wang Chong's manuscript of *Wei-Jin* regular style.

With the reference to his previous works of *Wei-Jin* regular style (Fig. 2.42 and Fig. 2.43) and masterworks by Zhong You (Fig. 2.44), Wang Xizhi (Fig. 2.45) and Wang Chong (Fig. 2.46), it is easy to perceive their prototypical significance for his script of the ten characters in his last work. Furthermore, it is worth noting that he used one simplified character of “时” (Fig. 2.41) instead of its traditional form “時.” The occasional use of simplified characters is a typical feature of the “*Wei* tablet-script” embodied in stone inscriptions from the Northern and Southern Dynasties.¹⁸¹



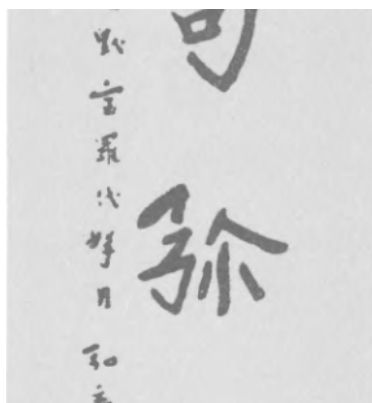
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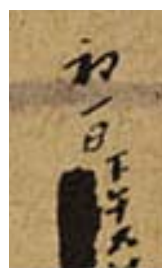
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Fig. 2.47 and Fig. 2.48 Stone inscriptions of irregular *Bei-xue* style.

¹⁸¹ Xiong Bingming, *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* [*Theoretical systems of Chinese calligraphy*], p. 187.



2.49



2.50

Fig. 2.49 Hongyi's early manuscript of irregular *Bei-xue* style.

Fig. 2.50 Hongyi's script of six characters in the lower right corner.

The six characters in the lower right corner (Fig. 2.50) are written in an irregular *Bei-xue* style, which was significantly displayed in the less-known epigraphs from the Northern and Southern Dynasties, as seen in Fig. 2.48 and Fig. 2.49. Most of these epigraphs were written by less-educated artisans and amateur calligraphers. Their calligraphic forms can hardly be suggestive of the prototypical character patterns and stroke shapes from classical masterworks. Additionally, they have both similarities and difficulties with the well-known stone inscriptions of *Bei-xue* style, such as *Zhang Menglong bei* and *Longmen sipin*. The latter two are considered to have been written by the well-educated elite, because their calligraphic forms are closest to the aesthetic standards shown in the *Jin-Tang* styled masterworks by the literati. So, in view of traditional scholars, the less-known epigraphs are presented in a disordered and free-styled form, showing sort of an irregular *Bei-xue* style. Wang Chang (1725-1806), a well-known scholar of *Qing* Dynasty, wrote that:

Northern *Wei* Dynasty witnessed many wars and conflicts and

produced lots of epigraphs on the tombstone in its remotes areas. These epigraphs were mostly for army generals and soldiers from minority groups, and their authors were peasants and herdsmen. These people used simple words and simplified characters to write inscriptions. Their calligraphy had nothing to do with the artistic tradition and it is not at all surprising that their calligraphy appears illiterate and vulgar.¹⁸²

However, in the eyes of the *Bei-xue* advocates, these epigraphs represent strong popular tastes. The well-known scholar Liang Qichao (1873-1929) used “the civilian calligraphic style” (“平民書風”) to describe them.¹⁸³ These scholars adored the calligraphic works that integrated its irregular, pristine features into their conventional styles based on the artistic tradition of calligraphy.¹⁸⁴ In his early years, Hongyi spent so much time imitating such epigraphs and wrote many works in the irregular *Bei-xue* style, as seen in Fig. 62.¹⁸⁵ His last script of the six characters seems to be less varied in the stroke shapes and hardly reveal an ever-changing downward and upward movement of the brush. The equal thickness of the strokes as well as their unmeasured ends and turnings make an impression that the characters are made of casually drawn lines instead of measured strokes in accordance with the artistic tradition. But in the meanwhile, each character seems to comprise rounded dots,

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁸⁵ Pan Liangzhen, “Hongyi fashi shufa pingzhuan [A critical commentary on Dharma Master Hongyi’s calligraphy],” p. 6.

parallel horizontals and parallel verticals. To some extent, these visual elements add to this subdivision with regularity and stability, which have been required of the official written forms since the ancient times. Thus, the calligraphic form of this subdivision can be accepted and approved by traditional scholars.

Chapter III

The composition of Hongyi's *Bei Xin Jiao Ji*

Part 1 Hongyi's innovation based on Flower Garland Buddhism

The Buddhist school of Flower Garland, known also as Flower Garland Buddhism, was founded on the basis of *The Flower Garland Sutra* by five patriarchs represented by Fazang (643-712). They were dedicated to hermeneutic work on this sutra, and organized its unsystematic and wide-ranging teachings into a theoretical system.¹⁸⁶ Many later Mahayana schools adopted this system as the theoretical foundation of their Buddhist doctrines, and Pure Land Buddhism was no exception.¹⁸⁷ Hongyi was also a disciple of Flower Garland Buddhism and regarded it as “the most profound among China’s ten important Buddhist Schools.”¹⁸⁸ This school emphasizes the all-embracing, non-obstructing aspect of Emptiness, and advocates the thought of “perfect harmony among all differences.” With his mind training based on it, he came

¹⁸⁶ Jin Mei, *Bei xin jiao ji: Hongyi fashi zhuan* [*A mixture of joy and sorrow: Biography of Dharma Master Hongyi*], pp. 570-71. .

¹⁸⁷ Wei Daoru, Introduction, *Zhongguo huayanzong tongshi* [*The general history of Chinese Flower Garland Buddhism*], p. x.

¹⁸⁸ Hongyi, “Fofa zongpai dagai [Introduction of Chinese Buddhist schools],” *Li Shutong shuo fo* [*Li Shutong teaches Buddhism*], ed. Zhou Hong, p. 87.

up with one of his innovative Buddhist ideas that Buddhism was not contrary to the science, but inclusive of and above it, as he wrote that:

Buddhism includes the advantages of all disciplines of knowledge and lessens their disadvantages.¹⁸⁹

The idea that Buddhism is contrary to science is not true. Modern scientists advocate experimentalism. This has two meanings: 1. to depend on the experience of mankind that we have got so far and never meditate; 2. to use human intellect to improve or to make up for its inexperience in case it is not sufficient to depend on the experience solely. Buddhism does the same. “Precept,” “Samadhi” and “Wisdom” that Buddhism advocates consist in improving or making up for its existing inexperience. However, from the standpoint of its improvement, science focuses on external objects, and Buddhism pays attention to the mind. By analogy, a person contracts an eye disease and cannot see things clearly, its scientific treatment is to move things in different directions until he can see them, while Buddhism will try to cure his eyes and recover his sight. Although both of them are experimental, the difference between the two is that the former is to treat its symptom and the latter to find its cause.¹⁹⁰

His Buddhist idea led to his most significant reform of Chinese calligraphy: he

¹⁸⁹ My translation. Hongyi, “Fofa dayi [The tenor of Buddhism],” p. 122.

¹⁹⁰ My translation. Hongyi, “Fofa shiyi lueshi [Explaining ten questions in Buddhism],” pp. 78-79.

applied Western painting principles to the composition of his calligraphy. He began this innovation when he was in Japan, where he studied Western painting, especially Impressionism. In his view, Western painting contained scientific principles because its techniques and composition are based on some tenets such as perspective, anatomy and chiaroscuro. According to Hongyi, his practice of Chinese calligraphy was equivalent to his Buddhist practice and he made it part of his daily religious life. He once said that “You see my calligraphy as you read the Buddhist sutras (“見我字如見佛法”)¹⁹¹ The use of some of the Western painting principles in his calligraphic work, especially in his last work, means that he introduced to some extent some scientific principles into Buddhism to end the assumption that Buddhism has nothing to do with the science and even contradicts it.

Hongyi was proficient in Western painting, both in theory and in practice. From 1906-1911, he followed Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924), a Japanese art master, to learn oil painting, watercolors, charcoal painting and caricatures in Tokyo School of Fine Arts, the most prominent art school in Japan at the time. Kuroda combined the detailed naturalism of the Academic School and Impressionist concepts and styles, and inaugurated Japanese Impressionist painting.¹⁹² Hongyi’s painting style was almost Impressionist. Jiang Danshu (1885-1962), a well-known modern art educator, highly

¹⁹¹ Hongduan, “Hongyi dashi shufa yishu de yanjiu [The study of Master Hongyi’s calligraphic art],” *Shufa yishu [Calligraphic arts]*, No. 2 (1998), p. 29.

¹⁹² Xiang Xian, “Li Shutong youhua jiedu: Zhongguo yinxiangpai huihua de zuizao jieshouzhe [An interpretation of Li Shutong’s oil paintings: the first Chinese who adopts Impressionist painting],” *Qingnian wenxuejia [Young writers]*, No. 2 (2009), p. 98.

praised his oil painting and said that “Some of his works are as good as the works by Cezanne (1839-1906).”¹⁹³ Hongyi took an active part in promoting Western painting methods. He thought that science and art are closely related. In his relevant essays and addresses, he expressed his such viewpoint as follows:

English intellectual Spenser said, “Literature and art are the flower of civilization.” And he also said, “Science is the maid of craft and the foundation of art.” From this perspective, any country that is advanced in art is based on its advanced science. If her science is not developed, her art cannot be developed either. The students of science must pay great attention to the study of graphics. The innovation of knowledge and techniques and the development of business and industry all depend on the development of science. So, art conveys human thought and is closely related to science.¹⁹⁴

Hongyi compared Western painting with Chinese traditional painting, and he had his notable saying about the differences between the two different artistic systems. It is as follows:

Chinese traditional painting emphasizes revealing a painter’s state of mind through his painting, which is called “spiritual revelation.” While Western painting is more realistic and emphasizes its objectivity and

¹⁹³ Ke Wenhui, *Kuangshi fanfu: Hongyi dazhuan* [An immortal person: Hongyi’s biography] (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2007), p. 44.

¹⁹⁴ My translation. Zhang Yaonan, ed., *Li shutong tan yi lu* [The collection of Li Shutong’s teachings on the art], p. 106.

accuracy. . . . At the initial stage of learning, no matter whether it's Chinese or Western painting we learn, we all need to get trained to draw the form of objects. You [Hongyi's students] at first learnt to draw Chinese traditional painting and then you learnt to draw Western paintings. As a result, you must have felt that Western painting, especially the sketch, is more precise and more scientific in depicting the form of objects Because its techniques, for example, the linear perspective, the usage of shade, light and color, are all based on science. . . . As time goes by, more and more new things will emerge in the future. Painting is used to describe things and social phenomena. We must keep in pace with the times and absorb something new as our resources. We must learn some new techniques and must not miss any chance to learn new techniques.¹⁹⁵

Though he stopped practicing Western painting after he became a monk, he continued to apply its principles of design and composition to his calligraphic works. His letter to Ma Donghan in 1938 shows how he did it. In the letter, he wrote:

When I write calligraphic work, I will completely follow Western painting principles, trying to relate and harmonize all the shapes and forms in the picture plane. A normal calligrapher always cares about calligraphic types or techniques, methods of handling the brush, structural composition of characters, philosophical significances, and even prototypical styles of a particular School of *Bei* [*Bei-xue* style] or of *Tie* [*Jin-Tang* style]. I will

¹⁹⁵ My translation. Ibid., pp. 150-51.

definitely not ponder over any of these calligraphic requirements and completely forget all of them. So, my calligraphic work should be taken as a drawing, and it is enough to take it as a drawing.¹⁹⁶

In terms of Western painting principles, he explained in his lecture of “Of the way to practice calligraphy” in 1937 why he followed them and how he used them to make a unified composition for his calligraphic work. He said that:

The quality of a large piece of calligraphic work depends on several determinants. Now I give them their appropriate scores in accordance with their shares in the quality of a calligraphic work:

Composition: fifty points;

Calligraphic form: thirty-five points;

Color effect of the [Chinese] ink: five points;

Seals: ten points.

Adding the above four determinants up, the total score is one hundred points. . . . Ordinary people care most about the calligraphic form. But according to my scoring criteria, it only scores thirty-five points. Maybe you may ask why the composition scores the most points. The reason is simple. Generally, there are three principles in art:

1. Unity;
2. Variety;
3. Order.

¹⁹⁶ My translation. Ibid., p. 187.

These three principles are of the most importance in Western painting. I use them here to measure the quality of a calligraphic work. When we are to write a piece of work, whether a large piece or a couplet, the first thing we need to care about is unity. We align the characters horizontally or vertically in order to relate them to each other. But such a simple relationship between them is not enough. We need to add variety to avoid boredom. Too much variety may give a chaotic impression. So we need to add a balancing force to get everything related and unified.¹⁹⁷

The principles of unity, variety and order are advocated by Nathan Goldstein in his *Design and Composition*, a book devoted to teaching the methods of composition in Western painting. There Goldstein wrote,

In viewing a unified work, we don't wish to add, delete, or change anything. All of its components seem to form harmonies and contrasts that interlock to form a great picture-enveloping pattern in which every part is dependent on every other part.¹⁹⁸

It can be easily seen that Hongyi's description of a unified composition is consistent with Goldstein's idea of unity after more than fifty years. Besides, when Hongyi was in Japan, he published a series of essays, such as "Methods of painting" and "Brief talks on Watercolors," in *Xingshi* [*Awakening lion*], a well-known art magazine of his

¹⁹⁷ My translation. Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁹⁸ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 18.

time, which was printed in Japan and popular in China.¹⁹⁹ The visual phenomena and conditions he introduced in these essays are discussed in detail with pictures and illustrations in *Design and Composition*. For this reason, some of Goldstein's pictures and Hongyi's own drawings and paintings will be used to illustrate the composition of his last calligraphic work at different levels.

As Goldstein noted, the principles of composition are “compositional necessities in all highly regarded works of art of whatever era or style.”²⁰⁰ A unified and balanced composition clarifies the artist's creative and expressive purposes which are best formed out of his understanding of the structural and organizational aspects of the “language of visibility,” and out of his intuition shaped by his prior knowledge.²⁰¹ Although some references will sometimes be made to some specific visual phenomena or universal visual conditions shown in Goldstein's book, the emphasis in this chapter is on the dynamic interactions of the visual elements in Hongyi's last work, for it is out of their integrating associations, and out of their harmonies, contrasts, directed actions, and tensions that the compositional order of the entire picture plane is formed, which contributes to his expression of “a mixture of joy and sorrow.” Moreover, there is no hard evidence that Hongyi recalled at the moment

¹⁹⁹ Lin Suxin, “Li Shutong and the Evolution of Graphic Arts in China,” *East Asia Journal*, 2, No. 1 (2007), 92.

²⁰⁰ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 6. “If we regard the study of design to be a study of the language of visibility, then the study of composition may be described as an examination of the structural and organizational aspects of that language.”

of his last creation, some specific paintings which suggest their relation to his last work. My aim is not to pinpoint sources by establishing connections between his last work and specific old paintings, painted either by him or by some other old masters, but to show their design and composition that could have prototypically affected the composition of his last work. I just use them to show they do have something to do with each other, whether it is acknowledged or not.

The composition of his last work is the consequence of his sensitivity to the interworking of visual elements and the energies they generate, and to the order in variation that can make a single interrelated system from a multiplicity of things. His intuition and intellect worked together in harmony there. He completely followed the fundamental principles in the formation of compositional order. His resolved composition possesses an active relational life in which the prominently directed actions are punctuated by the areas of emphasis that lend variety as they clarify his expressions. It shows a hierarchy of visual themes that depict, to different degrees, his state of mind between joy and sorrow on his deathbed. Such a composition shows its component visual elements, however much different and varied, to have finally been harmonized in a balanced and unified way.

Part 2 The integration of the draft's configuration shown on the paper back



3.1

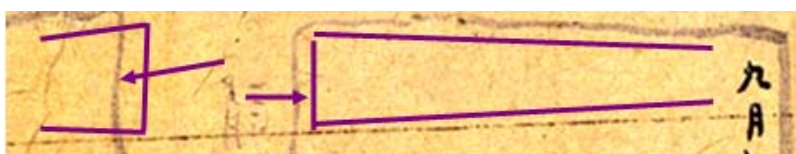
Fig. 3. 1 Configuration of the draft shown on the paper back in *Bei xin jiao ji*.

The draft previously written on the reverse side of the paper shows its back in lighter tones. The configuration of its back contains two frames and characters. The frames are irregularly shaped with slightly undulated lines, and the characters are vertically arranged along five parallel lines at a slightly sloping angle. With the help of the frames, the characters are subdivided into two groups. One group was written between the frames and the other, within the right frame. Hongyi succeeded in integrating these visual elements into his last work by largely using two integrating devices of “similarity” and “direction.”²⁰² The device of “similarity” is based on the visual phenomenon that things sharing common qualities are seen to be belonging

²⁰² Ibid., p. 10.

together and echoing each other even when they are located far apart in the design.²⁰³

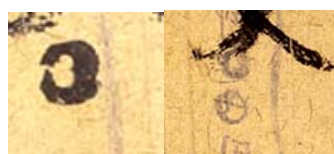
The device of “direction” is based on the visual phenomenon that a common movement among dissimilar parts produces a strong unifying force to have them related and integrated.²⁰⁴



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6

Fig. 3.2 Hongyi’s treatment of the straight line on top of the format.

Fig. 3.3 Curved line in the lower left corner of the format.

Fig. 3.4 Circle under the character of “經.”

Fig. 3.5 Round traces of correction shown on the paper back.

Fig. 3.6 Relationship between a squarish stroke and a square shown on the paper back.

Hongyi drew a straight line stretching through the top of the format and a curved line in its lower left corner. Both of them contrast and harmonize with the frames. The straight line connects the frames and corresponds to their top boundaries, as illustrated

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

in Fig. 3.2. They are thus combined with each other to make an organized upper part of the format and a more regularly shaped frame to its right. The curved line (Fig. 3.3) is shaped in accordance with the right boundary of the left frame and appears to be parallel with it. Together with the straight line, it makes a more regularly shaped frame to the left. The newly written characters of his last work are aligned in a directed action similar to that shown on the draft's back. Thus all the parts of the format join in forming a slightly diagonal movement. The circle below the character of “經” (Fig. 3.4) calls to the two round traces of correction to its upper right (Fig. 3.5). The thick squarish stroke in the lower right corner of the format has affinity with the empty square above it, as shown in Fig. 3.6. The implied spiral line underlying the characters along the right edge, as illustrated in Fig. 3.7, appears in concert with the curve of boundary line to its right. This is also the case in the characters of “交” and “集,” as shown in Fig. 3.7.



3.7



3.8

Fig. 3.7 Spiral underlying the characters along the right edge.

Fig. 3.8 Spirals underlying the imageries of “交” and “集.”

Part 3 The harmony with the draft's configuration shown on the paper back

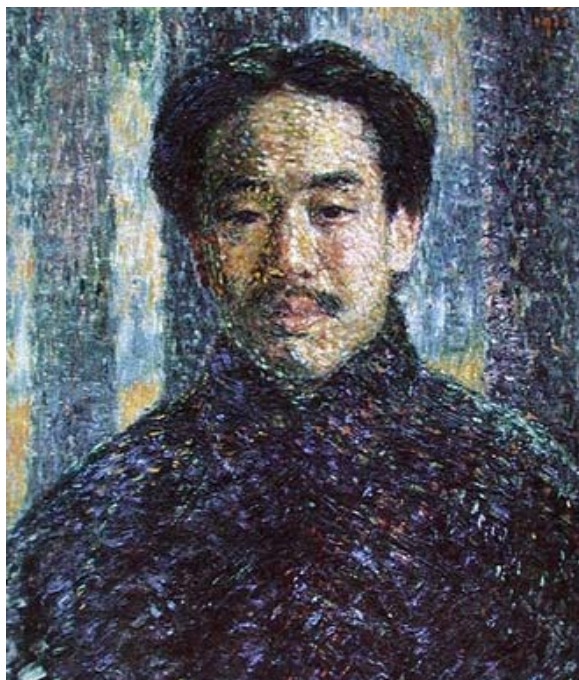
As seen in Fig. 3.9, the three lines of characters under the character of “悲” show their back in different values, which seem to gradually increase from left to right. With the help of the lightly toned empty space between them, they are enabled to impart a spatial effect. When it comes to the relationship between space and gradients, Goldstein says that “The spatial effect of any gradient can be most effective when it is more or less gradual,” and that “such gradient effects are the mainstay of what is called *aerial perspective*.”²⁰⁵ If we take the area around “悲” as a self-contained unit, his script of “悲” can be seen as the central figure in varying blacks, and its surroundings, the background in varying grays. They interact with each other through the gradient in values and create together an in-and-out space. Hongyi's design in this area is reminiscent of his *Self-portrait* (Fig. 3.10), one of his early paintings of Impressionist style. By means of the aerial perspective, he painted its background with “broad vertical strips of varying colors.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁰⁶ Chu Christina, “Transplantation of European Styles of Painting in China in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Humanities Diliman*, 5, No 1&2 (2008), pp. 166-89.



3.9

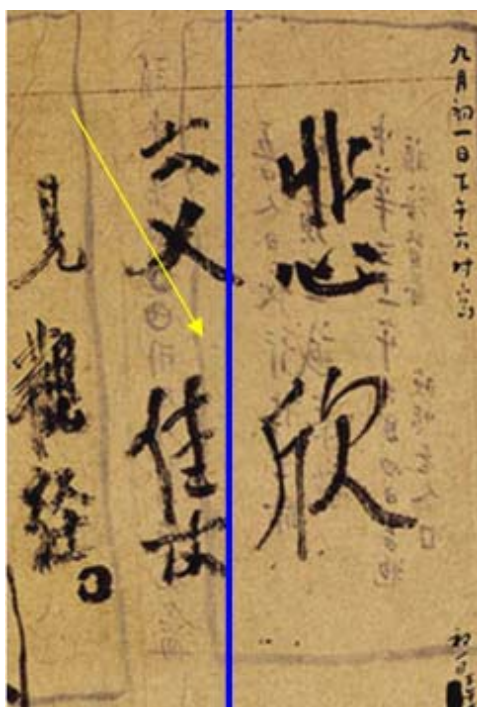


3.10

Fig. 3.9 Imagery of ‘悲.’

Fig. 3.10 Hongyi, *Self-portrait*. Oil on canvas. Dated 1911.

Although his last work shows tonal changes or value gradient, which tend to suggest three-dimensionality, these passages are few. It would be still predominantly two-dimensional without the addition of a double stroke in the lower left corner. This double stroke (Fig. 3.10) consists of a curved line and a dot-like stroke. The curved line is made part of a new frame that is mostly located in the spatial field. The dot-like stroke connecting to it seems to become one with the lower boundary line of the new frame. To some extent, it is like a gateway of the picture plane to the spatial field. Thus, a strong in-and-out phenomenon occurs in this work, but not at the expense of the quality of its two-dimensional order.



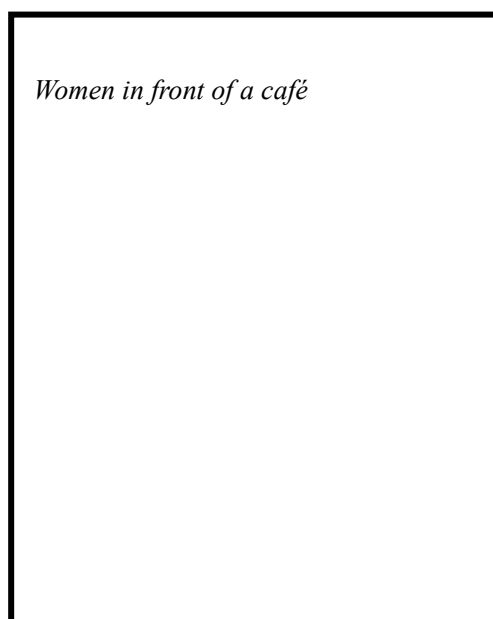
3.11

Fig. 3.11 Hongyi's treatment of the potential dividing line.

As shown in Fig. 3.11, the characters of “交” and “集” are written on either side of the boundary located near the midline of the format. This arrangement keeps the boundary from its dividing the picture and performs the same function as the straight line to have the draft's back integrated into his last work. It is worth noting that the straight line is thin enough and appears as a fast-moving “geometric line,”²⁰⁷ which visually will not lead to a division. His treatment of the potential dividing lines is reminiscent of Degas's handling of it in his painting *Women in front of a cafe* (Fig. 3.12). He drew a woman sitting on either side of the pillar stretching through the entire format to keep it from dividing the picture.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 64. “Geometric shapes predominate, in whatever style of art, they almost always are of a sharply focused, fast-moving, and reasoned kind.”

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 256-57.



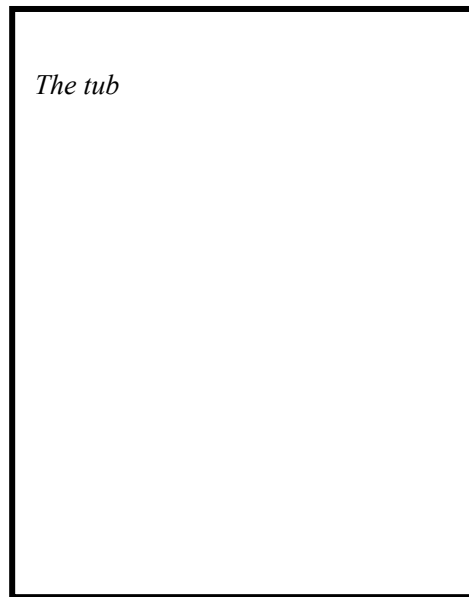
3.12

Fig. 3.12 Edgar Degas, *Women in front of a café*. Dated 1877. Pastel on monotype. The Louvre, Paris.

According to Goldstein's theory, dealing with the dividing lines is a compositional challenge, because it risks isolating one part of the work from the rest.²⁰⁹ As an inventive Impressionist painter, Degas was often attracted to such a challenge of a demanding kind. His relevant pastel *The tub* (Fig. 3.13) shows a similar handling.²¹⁰ The oblique divisions in its composition have more similarities with Hongyi's design in his last work.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

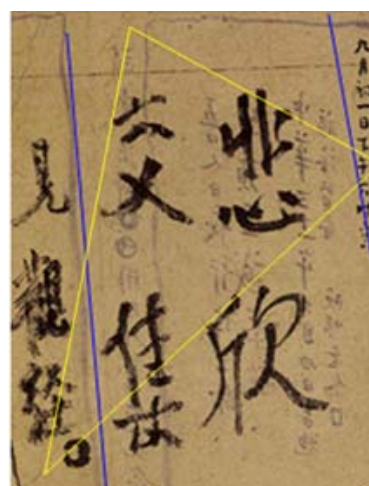
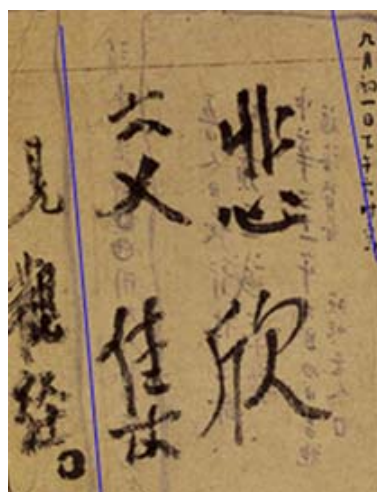


3.13

Fig. 3.13 Edgar Degas, *The tub*. Dated 1886. Pastel on cardboard. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Part 4 Compositional balance

As Goldstein noted, a composition's balance is based on the even distribution of its component parts between the two halves of its picture plane, which is divided by a "vertical, fulcrum like axis running through its center."²¹¹ It is of the utmost importance to a composition's unity.²¹² Visual weight and physical weight are two essential considerations in the balance of a work. The former refers to a degree of eye appeal based on an element's contrast with the rest of the work as well as its particular orientation, and the latter, the "downward direction that a form's weight dictates." An implied "directed movement" is at the heart of both weights, insofar as every visual element generates a directional energy.²¹³ A balanced composition demands stability based on the "pull and push of directed actions."²¹⁴



²¹¹ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 2.

²¹² Ibid., p. 18.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

3.14

3.15

Fig. 3.14 Implied common movement in the entire format of *Bei xin jiao ji*.

Fig. 3.15 Implied wedge-like shape underlying *Bei xin jiao ji*.

In Hongyi's last work, the four characters centrally located are divided into two opposing pairs and written in large size. This provides enough visual and physical weights to attract attention to their near symmetrical arrangement. Symmetry is a fundamental mode of achieving balance.²¹⁵ What threatens the composition's balance is its common diagonal movement to the right side of the format, as shown in Fig. 3.14. The required counterbalancing weight on the left is supplied by an implied large wedgelike shape, as illustrated in Fig. 3.15. The large wedge directs our eye movement to its downward thrust to the left. Using "wedge" to analyze a composition is based on the visual phenomenon that a wedgelike shape, no matter what it represents, will be seen as its moving in the direction of its point.²¹⁶

Goldstein introduced a particular visual phenomenon that "elements and parts appear to weigh more on the right than on the left side of a format, just as they seem to weigh more when located higher than lower in the format."²¹⁷ He further pointed out that any form takes on the most weight in the lower right corner of a format.²¹⁸ Hongyi followed this principle to balance his last work. To counter the weight of characters in the lower right corner of the format, he wrote larger characters on its left

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 263.

side to increase the value contrast among them. He further lessened the weight of the characters in the lower right corner by writing them in small size and with thin strokes, compressing them into a small group, and reducing tonal differences among them. To counter the weight of the characters in the upper part of the format, he drew a double stroke in the lower left corner, which serves as the point of the implied wedge and provided the needed visual weight.

Part 5 Compositional order

A hierarchy of compositional structures refers to the ranking of visual themes in their order of importance of a work's depictive and dynamic meanings. It is based on the artist's expressive intentions.²¹⁹ In his essay "The methods of drawing," Hongyi described it as "the most important among all the principles of composition" and further explained it as follows:

If there is no hierarchy in visual themes of a picture, the audience will be confused at what they really need to see, and the entire picture will be devoid of order and make no sense.²²⁰

The compositional order has much to do with the hierarchy of compositional structures. It is common that a work combines two or more compositional structures, but there is always one that is predominant.²²¹ The artist's option of basic

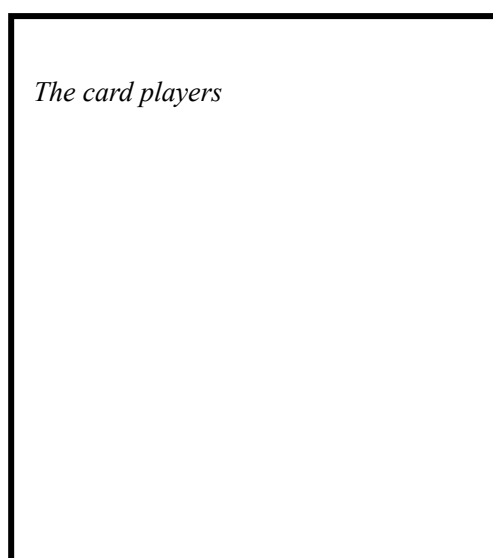
²¹⁹ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 15.

²²⁰ Zhao Yaonan, ed, *Li Shutong tan yi lu* [*The collection of Li Shutong's teachings on the art*], p. 91.

²²¹ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 202. He gave a description of fifteen basic compositional structures based on Rudolf Arnheim's two essential structures of grid and circle. 202 He explained his categorization and said, "The fifteen categories finally selected seemed to offer a useful and not unwieldy number of discernibly different compositional structures without becoming too specific on the one hand and offering only minor niceties of difference, or too general on the other and offering so few basic options that some useful structural systems might never come to light for consideration." p. 202

compositional structures is of intellect and of intent, as Goldstein noted,

Even if these options are more often provided by the artist's intuition than by conscious choice, each of these strategies and devices were first discovered, learned, observed, debated, or in some other way consciously considered at some earlier point in the artist's development.²²²



3.16

Fig. 3.16 Paul Cezanne, *The card players*. 1890-1892. Oil on canvas.

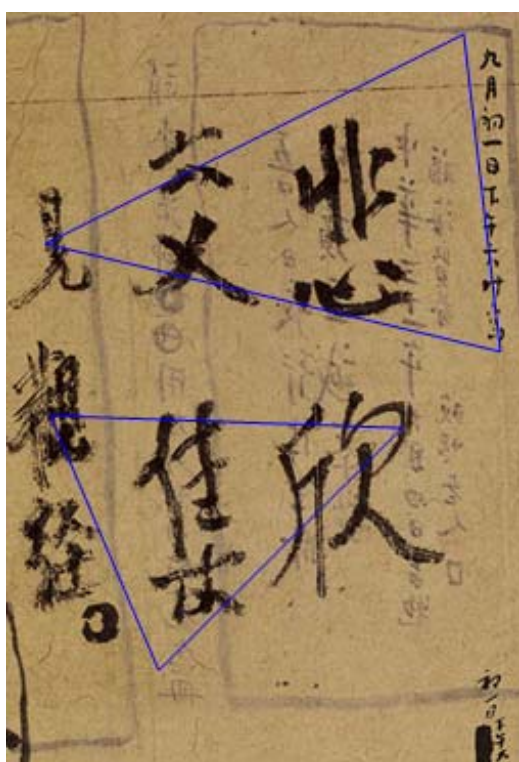
At first glance, the hierarchy of visual themes in Hongyi's last work can be naturally associated with that in Cezanne's *The card players* (Fig. 3.16) Goldstein described this painting as follows:

The centrality of the large configuration of the card players is the chief system, but nearly evident is the radial burst originating at the round drawer pull. . . . The stabilizing grid is subtly evident.²²³

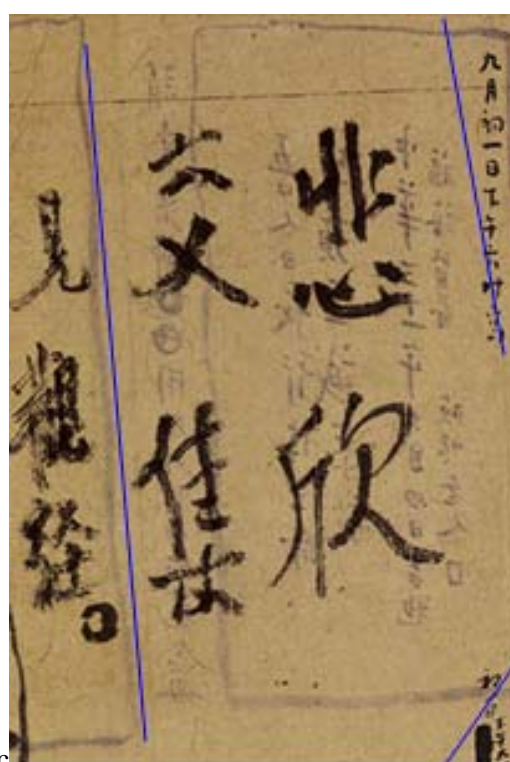
²²² Ibid., p. 256.

²²³ Ibid., p. 236.

The structure of central location is also dominant in Hongyi's last work. The radial burst originates from the empty center of its format and expands to its surroundings in the direction of various diagonal strokes. To some extent, the empty center signifies infinity and "Emptiness," the core of Buddhism. The lines and characters shown on the paper back form the grid structure underlying the work's imagery.



3.17



3.18

Fig. 3.17 Implied circle structure in the entire format of *Bei xin jiao ji*.

Fig. 3.18 Implied cantilever structure in the entire format of *Bei xin jiao ji*.

The circle structure is implied in his composition, which is a structure carrying us around the entire format, as well as in and out of the picture's "spatial field of depth."²²⁴ The characters along the right edge and "悲," "交" and "見," collectively

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 237. In the section of "The circle structure," 204-206. 204

produce a wedgelike shape. Its point is seen as racing to meet the downward moving boundary line of the left frame, and then to meet another wedgelike shape produced from the lower left corner to the character of “欣.” These three units meet at the left margin of the format and keep turning around to create a rightward-moving fanlike action that enlivens the entire image, as illustrated in Fig. 3.17.

The cantilever is based on the “shifting perspective,” which encompasses “different viewpoints and unusual angles of vision” and collapses the “space between near and far to grant more or less equal emphasis to all the elements in a composition.”²²⁵ The cantilever structure lies in that “any large configuration entering to format from any side and ending within it.”²²⁶ In Hongyi’s last work, the configurations within the left frame naturally assume cantilevered segments, as do the characters along the right edge and in the lower right corner, as shown in Fig. 3.18. The even spread structure is also based on the shifting perspective. Compared with the cantilever structure, it emphasizes “a more or less even distribution of elements and parts” in its avoidance of emphasis.²²⁷ Prior knowledge of what we recall about the function of a work’s parts can strongly influence balance.²²⁸ As I analyzed in the first

²²⁵ Ann Dumas, “Old Art into New: The Impressionists and the Reinvention of Tradition,” *Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and the Art of the Past*, ed. Ann Dumas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 40.

²²⁶ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 219. In the sections of “The cantilever structure” and “The even spread.”

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 193. For the compositional meaning of prior knowledge, see Ibid., pp. 193-95, 197.

two chapters, every part of his last work is carefully designed and has its particular use. So its every visual element can be taken as a point of emphasis and will rivet even attention, even if it possesses little visual and physical weight.

The structures of emphasis on horizontality, verticality and diagonality are at the same time underpinning his composition. As Goldstein noted,

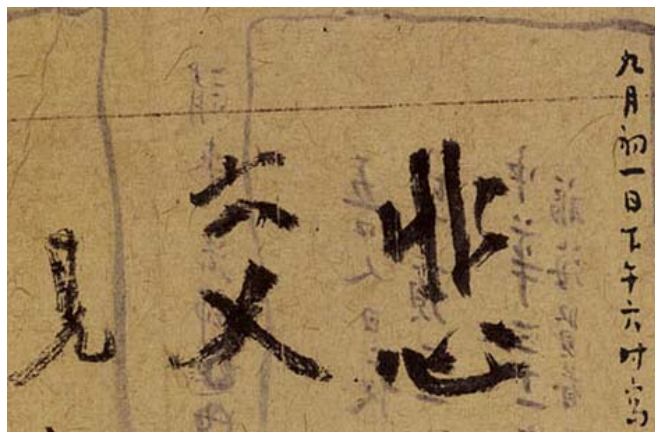
Horizontal lines and shapes suggest tranquility and low tension. In being parallel with the ground plane they do not resist the pull of gravity. They seem to be at rest and to have “given in” to their weight.²²⁹



3.19

Fig. 3.19 Hongyi's illustration published in 1912.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 225. For the compositional order of emphasis on horizontality, see Ibid., pp. 225-28.

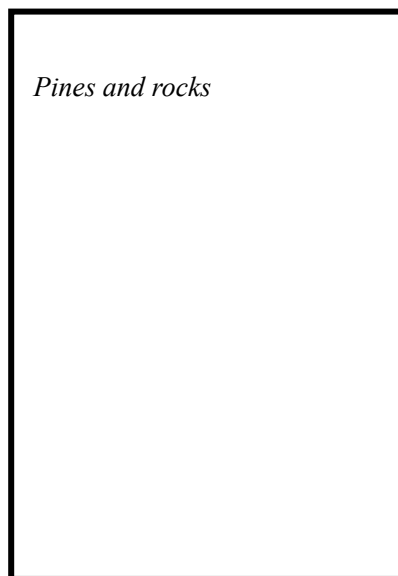


3.20

.Fig. 3.20 Implied compositional order of emphasis on horizontality in the entire format of *Bei xin jiao ji*.

In Hongyi's last work, horizontal lines predominate in the upper and lower parts of the format, suggesting repose and a tranquil and serene mood. Fig. 3.19, one of his early illustrations, shows a tranquil setting based on a horizontally dominant structure. By juxtaposing Hongyi's last work (Fig. 3.20) and this illustration, we can easily find their similarities in the visual theme. So far as the entire format is concerned, all the visual elements are carried along by a vertically oriented movement. In the meanwhile, almost all the strokes of characters are made into variously tilted lines and shapes, which seem to be engaged in a vigorous and tensional combat. His combination of verticality and diagonality is more or less similar to Cezanne's handling of his painting *Pines and rocks* (Fig. 3.21), in which the solemn dignity of the tree trunks "stabilizes a spirited exchange of diagonal thrusts and counterthrusts."²³⁰

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 229.



3.21

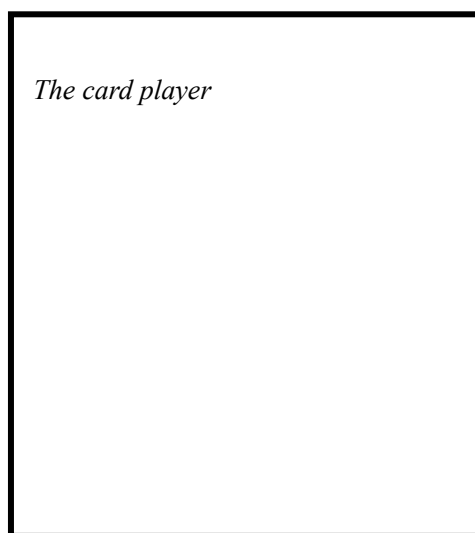
Fig. 3.21 Paul Cezanne, *Pines and rocks*. 1896-1899. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Part 6 Aesthetic allusions in composition

Each of the four large characters with its surroundings seems to be a self-contained unit. Hongyi's design in each unit is kept in a compositional order and has more or less aesthetic allusions to some old drawings or paintings of his own or Impressionist painters.



3.22



3.23

Fig. 3.22 Near symmetrical composition in the imagery of “悲.”

Fig. 3.23 Paul Cezanne, *The card players*. 1894-1895. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In the unit of “悲,” his design in its upper part (Fig. 3.22) alludes to Cezanne's *Card players* (Fig. 3.23). Two vertical strokes are parallel and tilt slightly rightwards. The two double strokes on each side of them show firm turnings and point to the midline of the unit. This symmetrical arrangement recalls one of Cezanne's classical treatment of the two figures with bent arms. In his painting, the axis of the format runs through the bottle standing in the middle of their hands holding cards.

Also, the form of the two double strokes can be associated with the eyes of the young girl in *The portrait of a young girl* (Fig. 3.24), one of Hongyi's early charcoal drawings. Her eyes express a kind of grief or sorrow. Fig. 3.25 is a caricature of twelve different facial expressions, which are transfigured from the character of “曾.” He began to represent Chinese characters in the form of modern caricature as early as his student life in Japan.²³¹ It is not surprising that he applied it to his calligraphy.



3.24



3.25

Fig. 3.24 Hongyi, *The portrait of a young girl*. Dated 1907. Charcoal on paper.

Fig. 3.25 Hongyi's caricature of the character of “曾.” Dated 1909.

He designed a vertical and diagonal common movement in the entire format. It allows a dual reading of his last work, which, to some extent, helps to understand his

²³¹ Ke Wenhui, *Kuangshi fanfu: Hongyi dazhuan* [An immortal person: Hongyi's biography], p. 47.

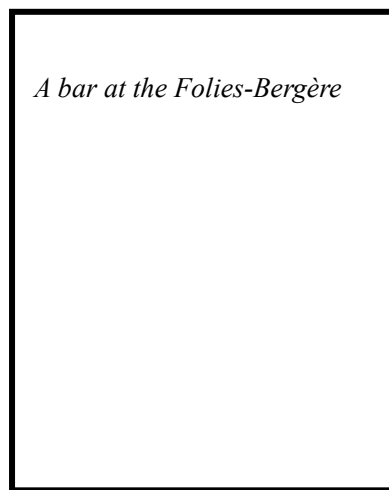
intertwined state of mind on his deathbed: his joy and sorrow were in one. The characters of “悲欣交集” can express more than their original meanings. His script of them can be read vertically as it stands or diagonally in the direction of the common movement. Both readings occur at the same time to produce a riveting visual illusion. For example, when we see the image of “悲” in the direction of the common movement, it will assume a new form, as shown in Fig. 3.26. An implied pyramid underlying the image and his arrangement of the strokes in its lower part bring about great allusions to Manet’s composition of *A bar at the Folies-Bergere* (Fig. 3.27). In this painting, flowers, oranges and the woman’s left sleeve were made into a group contrasting with that of a bracelet and her right sleeve, and her forearms and forehead come to form an underlying pyramid. The pyramid structure is a variant of triangle structure and suggests stability and tension, as Goldstein noted,

Unlike the grid’s stability and the circle’s centering nature, which strongly reinforce our world as we see it or want it to be, a triangular compositional structure, except when it is oriented on a vertical midline, brings its own high-tension character – its own “insecurity” – with it. . . . For all its inherent energy, it can show a stately stability when vertically oriented in the format, and when not too plainly evident in the design. . . . Whether plainly or subtly shown, and whether we find it in nonobjective or figurative works, the triangle’s inner forces always impart a taut and assertive quality.²³²

²³² Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 208.



3.26

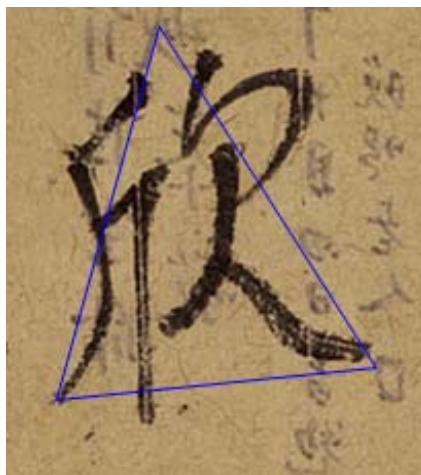


3.27

Fig. 3.26 Implied pyramid structure in the imagery of “悲.”

Fig. 3.27 Edouard Manet, *A bar at the Folies-Bergère*. Dated 1882. Oil on canvas. Courtauld institute of art, London.

Seen vertically from the front, the triangle structure brings “its own high-tension character” to the unit of “悲,” which helps to express its original meaning of “sorrow.” In the meanwhile, seen in the diagonal direction, the pyramid structure produces a stately stability, which helps to express the joy mixed in sorrow.



3.28

Fig. 3.28 Organic shapes and the implied triangle structure in the imagery of “欣.”

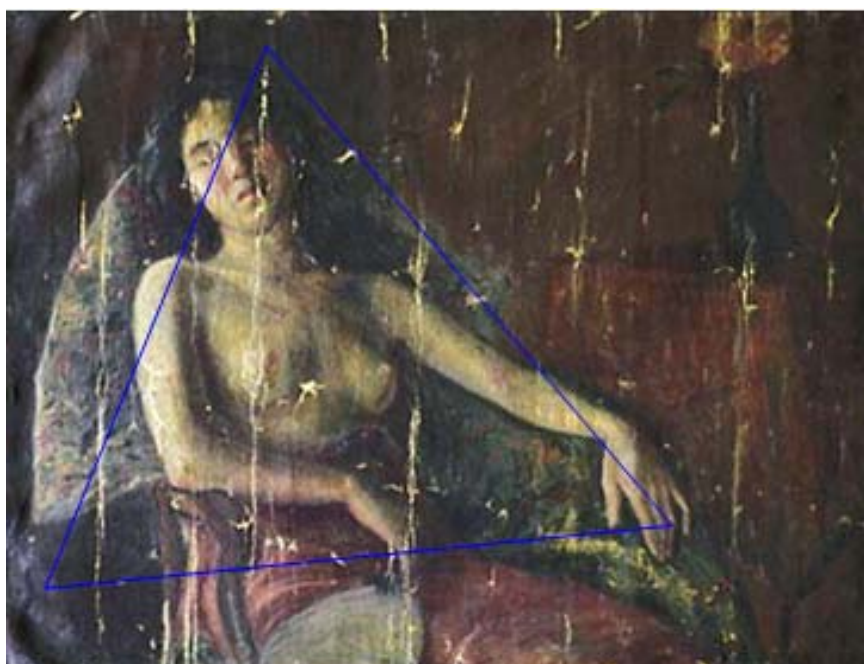
The organic shapes predominate in the unit of “欣” (Fig. 3.28). Organic shapes recall the “irregular, often undulating contours in nature,” and show little or no passages of straight or evenly curved edges.²³³ Goldstein noted, “When organic shapes predominate in a work, the imagery is often of a tactile, even sensual kind.”²³⁴ The imagery of “欣” is of such a kind and suggests, to some degrees, repose and relief from a tensional state of mind. It alludes to the figure of *The nude* (Fig. 3.29), one of Hongyi’s early oil paintings. The model reposes herself by reclining in a chair with her right arm supporting her body, as well as the little finger and forefinger of her left hand slightly lifted. Ke Wenhui commented this painting and wrote, “She is a state of relaxation, but she appears to remain awake.”²³⁵ Both of the imageries have an implied askew triangular structure, which is somewhat at a slightly sloping angle and

²³³ Ibid., p. 64.

²³⁴ Ibid., pp. 64-67.

²³⁵ Ke Wenhui, *Kuangshi fanfu: Hongyi dazhuan* [An immortal person: Hongyi’s biography], p. 48.

suggests a tensional thrust. His unity of organic shapes and triangle structure contributes to expressing the meaning of mixture implied in the word of “欣.”



3.29

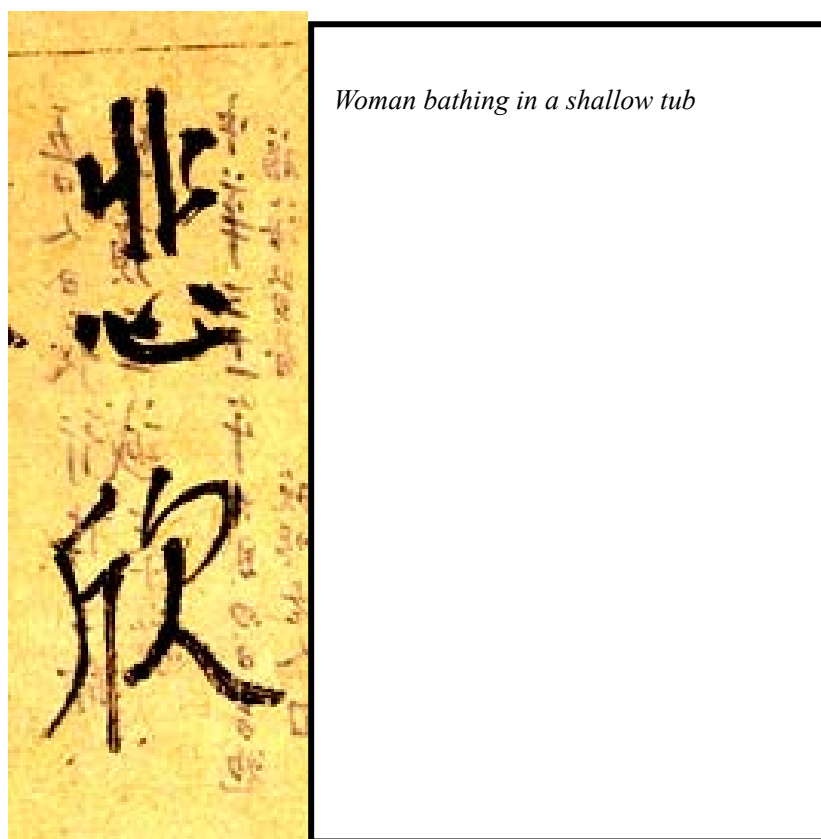
Fig. 3.29 Hongyi, *The nude*. Dated 1911. Oil on canvas.

Take the units of “悲” and “欣” as a whole (3.30). The upper part of “悲” and the left part of “欣” are straight-edge dominant,²³⁶ while the curvilinear predominates in their rest parts. The trade-offs between straight edges and curves recall Degas’s handling of his pastel *Woman bathing in a shallow tub* (Fig. 3.31). Goldstein described its composition as follows:

Here Degas places one angular and one round shape at the top and at the bottom of the format. Above, the squarish drape is subordinate to the rounded shape of the woman’s torso; below, the shallow tub is subordinate to the squarish shape of the lower limbs. Such trade-offs have strong

²³⁶ Goldstein, *Design and Composition*, p. 240.

integrating power.²³⁷



3.30

3.31

Fig. 3.30 Trade-offs between the imageries of “悲” and “欣.”

Fig. 3.31 Degas Edgar, *Woman bathing in a shallow tub*. Dated 1885. Pastel on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The trade-offs have these two units related, integrated, and in harmony, though they are both self-contained and located a little far from each other.

In the area of “交” underlies an undulating boundary line. Its contrast with the the strokes of “交” expressively depict its original meaning: an act or process of mixing together. As shown in Fig. 3.32, the boundary line is the only element that is

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

vertically oriented, while the strokes of “交” occupy various diagonal directions. The top dot-like stroke seems to be vertical, but in fact it is not. It is finished with a little hook pointing to its upper left. The little hook determines the stroke’s diagonal direction, though it possesses little physical and visual weight. This is an example of prior knowledge influencing perception. The strong contrast between the strokes and the boundary line recalls El Greco’s *“The resurrection of Christ”* (Fig. 3.33). In this painting, the elongated, tossed and radiating shapes are largely used to depict the actions of figures. Only the imagery of Christ is vertically oriented, while the others surrounding it are oriented in various diagonal directions. Goldstein described this painting as follows,

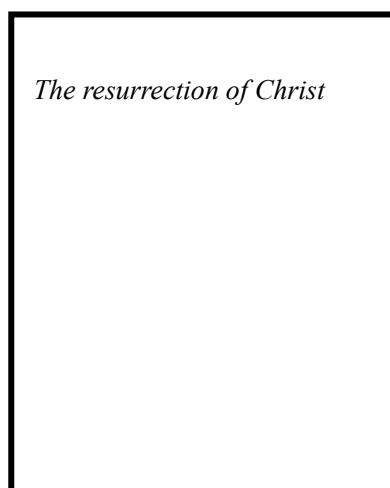
A large part of this work’s expressive meaning can be traced to the contrast between the eruptive character and diagonality of the shapes surrounding the figure of Christ, with the fluent character and verticality of the shapes comprising the central figure.²³⁸

As long as we replace “the figure of Christ” with the “the underlying boundary line,” Goldstein’s description will be fully applicable to Hongyi’s design in this area.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 83.



3.32



3.33



3.34

Fig. 3.32 Tensional contrast in the imagery of “交.”

Fig. 3.33 El Greco, *The resurrection of Christ*. 1600-1605. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 3.34 Implied diamond structure and askew triangles in the imagery of “交.”

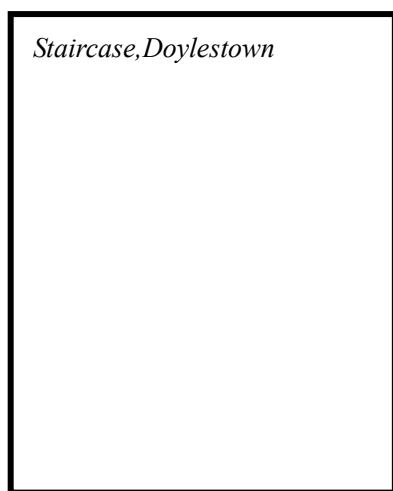
The tensional contrast in the imagery of “交” is further intensified by some small askew triangles with their powerful moving actions, as illustrated in Fig. 3.34. The conflicting tilts and tensions themselves endanger the unit’s balance, while the stabilizing force is provided by an implied diamond structure owing to two opposing pairs of strokes. As Goldstein noted, the diamond structure is featured by its stabilizing quality.²³⁹ Moreover, here it serves as a foil against which the diagonally directed actions take on more meaning.

The unit of “集” can be seen as an abstract painting of cross-contour lines, which “move in a slower, more tactile manner, explaining its surface changes with each turning.”²⁴⁰ Goldstein compared it to a bug “dipped in ink, leave a trail that

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 211. In the section of “The diamond structure,” Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

records every rise and fall.”²⁴¹ With its drier color and undulating strokes, Hongyi’s script of “集” clearly exhibits his brush movements at the moment of creation so that the spectator could feel the rhythm in his hand, his sensitivity to the interworking of the brush, ink and rice paper, and even a “plain, tranquil and innocent flavor” naturally revealed from his calligraphy, which is the pursuit of his entire Buddhist life.



3.35



3.36

Fig. 3.35 Charles Sheeler, *Staircase, Doylestown*. Dated 1925. Oil on canvas.

Fig. 3.36 Spiral underlying the imagery of “集.”

Furthermore, the imagery of “集” takes on a curvilinear dominant structure. Goldstein exemplified this compositional structure in Sheeler’s *Staircase, Doylestown* (Fig. 3.35). He wrote,

A curvilinear structure is based on a simple or complex network of curves and spirals underlying a work’s imagery, which may itself contain few if any curved or rounded forms.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 231.

As shown in Fig. 3.36, an implied spiral line is underlying in a grid-like form of cross-contour lines. Such a design instills a kind of pliancy and composure. They find a full expression in the imagery of “集.”

Conclusion

Hongyi is both a master monk of Pure Land Buddhism and a Buddhist calligrapher. All the merits he gained by his Buddhist practice changed into the four words of *Bei xin jiao ji* in his last calligraphic work to benefit all sentient beings. The literary content of *Bei xin jiao ji* remarkably reveals the essence of Pure Land Buddhism, showing his strong desire to transfer, at his last moment, his attitude of utmost sincerity, the “pure karma,” and his aspiration for attainment to the Western Pure Land.

His last work fully exemplifies the influence of his Buddhist thought on his calligraphy. Every word and figure in it was carefully designed. The two groups of characters and the circle below the three words of *Jian guanjing* together form the main content. They are presented in a form of hermeneutics he first proposed, practiced and advocated in his Buddhist life. The main text is *Bei xin jiao ji* of “悲欣交集” [“a mixture of joy and sorrow”], a Buddhist term from the sixth volume of *The Shurangama Sutra*. This term incarnates his clear tracks of mind, which is a mixture of joy and sorrow, from the moment he chose to convert to Pure Land Buddhism to the moment he attained the “dharma-door of becoming a Buddha” in the Age of Dharma Decline. The ambiguity of Chinese characters and the intertextuality of Chinese literature make each of the four characters of *Bei xin jiao ji* in its best use. *Bei* of “悲” is meant as one’s great compassionate heart to take pity

on and care for all sentient beings, which lays the foundation of becoming a Buddha and guarantees him a higher grade when he is born in the Western Pure Land. *Xin* of “欣” expresses one’s joy he enjoys while he is actually suffering on behalf of all sentient beings through his dependence upon Amitayus Buddha for their salvation and one’s joy of attaining his rebirth in the Western Pure Land. *Jiao* of “交” represents Hongyi’s Buddhist mind based on the thought of “perfect harmony among all differences,” and his four-in-one method of Buddhist practice. *Ji* of “集” reveals his devotion to Pure Land Buddhism, and his steadfast aspiration for attainment to the Western Pure Land. The text of *Jian guanjing* leads people to *The Contemplation Sutra*, an important Pure Land sutra which focuses on the “pure karma” and summarizes it into three “acts of merit” required for whoever wishes to be born in the Western Pure Land. This text places the whole content of his last work in the context of the “pure karma.” The circle with a gap echoes the setting sun and full moon, the Buddhist imageries he uses to express his aspiration for nirvana and enlightenment. It illustrates his mixture of joy and sorrow.

The text shown on the paper back contains the six words of “吾人日夜诚行 [No matter when and how we behave, we must assume an attitude of utmost sincerity].” These six words are sufficient to convey the main idea of Ouyi’s original teaching. His teaching stresses the importance of utmost sincerity, which is the key to the “easy path” advocated by Pure Land Buddhism, and also the ultimate root of “a mixture of joy and sorrow.”

Hongyi chooses to write his last calligraphic work on a used piece of paper,

and harmonizes his last script with the draft shown on the paper back. His act reflects his care for his mother, his observance of the precept of not killing and not stealing, and his compassion and love for all sentient beings. This act itself pertains to the “pure karma” according to *The Contemplation Sutra*. What’s more, he foretells in his last reminiscent work the posture he would take at the moment of his nirvana: lying down in the rain of pale yellow petals as a Buddha.

The whole literary content of his last work shows the quintessence of Pure Land Buddhism he studied, upheld and advocated all his monastic life. It can be regarded as the best substitute for his personality as a Pure Land Buddhist Master.

The calligraphic form of *Bei xin jiao ji* furthermore presents the Buddhist concept of a form without form. The script of “悲欣交集” perfectly demonstrates the visual idiosyncrasies of his late “Hongyi-style,” which is known for its integration of five canonical types of script and its unity of *Jin-Tang* style and *Bei-xue* style. Particularly, his script recalls Wang Xizhi’s cursive style, which is the artistic foundation of the *Jin-Tang* system, and the “*Wei* tablet-script” of *ZhangMenglong bei*, which is known as the best regular style of the *Bei-xue* system. The script of “見觀經” emulates the *Jin-Tang* style, which is the mainstay of his early “Hongyi-style.” Especially, it echoes the cursive style of Huang Tingjian and the regular style of Liu Gongquan. The script of the ten characters along the right edge emulates the *Wei-Jin* regular style, which has been the tradition to write small sized characters since the Eastern *Jin* Dynasty. The script of the six characters in the lower right corner pertains to the irregular *Bei-xue* style, which represents the

calligraphy of common people and nurtured Hongyi's early personal style.

The overall calligraphic form of his last work achieves the highest aesthetic level as *Jin-Tang* styled masterworks. Also, it is suitable for both refined and popular tastes, and can appeal to people of different cultural backgrounds as *Bei-xue* styled masterworks do. What is more, it realizes the harmony between his personal styles and two systems of writing. Unlike his previous works in which one particular style predominates, his last work makes a brand new style that is a single interrelated style from a multiplicity of types and styles. To some extent, it realizes his aspiration to "develop all the aesthetic potentials of calligraphy." In this sense, he has visualized in his last work a form without form as it is described in *The Flower Garland Sutra*.

Hongyi has made for his last work a balanced and unified composition based on Western painting principles. With the help of the integrating devices of "similarity" and "direction," the potentially chaotic configuration of the draft shown on the paper back has turned into a well-organized and regularly shaped framework. Each subdivision of his last work is kept in order and has more or less allusions to old drawings and paintings. The principles of unity, balance and variety and the compositional order help to have all the visual elements on the format related to each other, integrated with each other and in harmony. The resolved composition of his last work possesses an active relational life. Such a composition is a guarantee of a calligraphic form without form to come and helps to illustrate his feelings and state of mind on his deathbed. In its true perspective, we can see that Hongyi

succeeds in having Western painting principles seamlessly integrated into his calligraphic work. To some extent, his last work exemplifies his innovative Buddhist idea that Buddhism is not contrary to science, but inclusive of and above it.

In short, my study and analysis of Hongyi's last work reveal that he is a great Buddhist calligrapher who combines his faith with his calligraphy. He applies the Buddhist idea of a form without form in his ordinary practice of calligraphy and has it shown in his last work. He combines his religious faith and science to form a brand new calligraphic style and his last work exemplifies this innovative style of his by using Western painting principles to make a distinctive composition for it. His *Bei xin jiao ji* gives also a full expression to his Buddhist ideas in both content and form, the ultimate state of his Buddhist practice and the highest level of his calligraphy as well. Furthermore, it stands out as a new notable landmark in the development of modern Chinese calligraphy and suits both the refined and popular tastes.

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